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AESCHYLUS

The Persians and Other Plays



THE PERSIANS AND OTHER PLAYS

AESCHYLUS (born at Eleusis, near Athens, c. 525 BC; died at Gela, Sicily, 456 BC) was the dramatist who first made Athenian tragedy one of the world's great art forms, though in his epitaph he (or his family) preferred that he should be remembered as one of those who fought the Persians at Marathon. In a career of more than forty years he wrote about eighty plays, and two-thirds of his productions won first prize in the City Dionysia tragic competition. Seven plays attributed to him have survived, one of which – *Prometheus Bound* – may actually be by his son. Aeschylus, who visited Syracuse more than once at the invitation of Hieron I, was recognized as a classic writer soon after his death, and special privileges were decreed for his plays.

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AESCHYLUS

The Persians and
Other Plays

The Persians
Seven Against Thebes
The Suppliants
Prometheus Bound

Translated with an Introduction by
ALAN H. SOMMERSTEIN

PENGUIN BOOKS

PENGUIN CLASSICS

Published by the Penguin Group

Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, USA

Penguin Group (Canada), 90 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 700, Toronto, Ontario,
Canada M4P 2Y3

(a division of Pearson Penguin Canada Inc.)

Penguin Ireland, 25 St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2, Ireland

(a division of Penguin Books Ltd)

Penguin Group (Australia), 250 Camberwell Road, Camberwell, Victoria 3124,
Australia

(a division of Pearson Australia Group Pty Ltd)

Penguin Books India Pvt Ltd, 11 Community Centre, Panchsheel Park, New Delhi –
110 017, India

Penguin Group (NZ), 67 Apollo Drive, Rosedale, North Shore 0632, New Zealand
(a division of Pearson New Zealand Ltd)

Penguin Books (South Africa) (Pty) Ltd, 24 Sturdee Avenue, Rosebank,
Johannesburg 2196, South Africa

Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices: 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

www.penguin.com

This edition first published in Penguin Classics 2009

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ISBN: 978-0-14-195589-6

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Notes

Preface

This book is based on my three-volume edition with translation of the plays and fragments of Aeschylus in the Loeb Classical Library, published by Harvard University Press in 2008; I am most grateful both to the Trustees of the Press and to Penguin Books for making it possible for me to bring out my translation of four of the seven surviving plays (together with the fragments of other plays which are known, or which can be assumed with reasonable confidence, to have been produced on the same occasions) in a form more likely to appeal to a broader and less specialized readership. The translation itself is identical with that which appeared in the Loeb volumes. May it help to spread the understanding and appreciation of one who was both a great dramatist and a great democrat.

A.H.S.

Chronology

Dates given in the form 525/4, 508/7 etc. refer to the Athenian calendar year, which began and ended in the summer. Surviving plays of Aeschylus are shown in capitals.

Year BC

- 525/4** Traditional date of Aeschylus' birth at Eleusis, west of Athens
- 514** Hipparchus, brother of the autocrat ('tyrant') Hippias, assassinated by Harmodius and Aristogeiton
- 510** Hippias expelled with Spartan aid
- 508/7** Cleisthenes establishes democracy at Athens
- 499 (?)** Aeschylus' first tragic production
- 490** First Persian invasion; battle of Marathon, in which Aeschylus takes part and his brother Cynegeirus is killed
- 485/4** Aeschylus wins the tragic competition for the first time
- 483–480** Themistocles creates great Athenian navy
- 480** Second Persian invasion, and sack of Athens; battles of Thermopylae (land), Artemisium (sea) and Salamis (sea); Xerxes leaves Mardonius to winter in Greece. Carthaginian offensive in Sicily defeated by Gelon of Syracuse at Himera
- 479** Persians defeated at Plataea (land) and off Mycale in Asia Minor (sea), and lose control of the Asian Greeks
- 479/8** Xanthippus (Pericles' father) captures Sestos on the Hellespont; brings Xerxes' bridge-cables to Athens
- 478/7** Foundation of Athenian-led alliance (often called the Delian League) comprising most Greek states of the northern and eastern Aegean and its islands
- 477/6** Phrynichus wins tragic competition with Themistocles as his sponsor (*choregos*), probably with a play or plays about the Persian War
- 473 (?)** Death of Phrynichus
- 473/2** Aeschylus victorious with *Phineus*, *THE PERSIANS*, *Glaucus of Potniae* and *Prometheus the Fire-Bearer*; Pericles, aged twenty-three, is his *choregos*
- c. 470** Themistocles ostracized (exiled without charge by popular

- vote). Aeschylus visits Sicily at invitation of Hieron of Syracuse (Gelon's brother); produces *The Women of Aetna* there, and restages *The Persians* (and perhaps *Glaucus of Potniae* as well?)
- 469/8** Sophocles victorious for first time, perhaps defeating Aeschylus
- 468/7** Aeschylus victorious with *Laius*, *Oedipus*, *SEVEN AGAINST THEBES* and *The Sphinx* (Sophocles not competing)
- 464/3 (?)** Aeschylus defeats Sophocles with *The Egyptians*, *THE SUPPLIANTS*, *The Danaids* and *Amymone*.
- 462/1** After Cimon's army, sent to aid Sparta against rebellious subjects, is dismissed by the Spartans, Athens ends its alliance with Sparta and makes a new one with Sparta's enemy Argos. Cimon is ostracized. Ephialtes carries laws drastically reducing constraints on powers of democratic institutions but is assassinated shortly thereafter; Pericles begins to emerge as leading figure in his place
- 460** Athens makes alliance with Megara, which is already at war with Sparta's ally Corinth
- 459** Outbreak of open war with Sparta and her allies (which lasts, with intervals, until 446). Major expedition to Cyprus (against Persians) diverted to Egypt, where Athenians and allies will be engaged for five years
- 459/8 (winter)** State funeral for between fifteen hundred and two thousand Athenians (out of a total citizen population unlikely to have exceeded two hundred thousand) killed in year's fighting in Europe, Asia and Africa
- 459/8 (spring)** Aeschylus wins the last of his thirteen lifetime first prizes with the *Oresteia* (*AGAMEMNON*, *THE LIBATION-BEARERS*, *THE EUMENIDES* and *Proteus*)
- 456/5** Death of Aeschylus at Gela (Sicily)
- 456/5** Euripides' first production
- 432/1** Aeschylus' son Euphorion wins one of several first prizes he gained by producing his father's plays (though some of them may have been his own), defeating Sophocles and Euripides (Euripides' production included *Medea*); the latest plausible date for the production of *PROMETHEUS BOUND* and *Prometheus Unbound*.
Outbreak of Peloponnesian War

General Introduction

Aeschylus is traditionally thought to have been born in 525/4 BC, at Eleusis in western Attica, a town famous as the home of the immensely popular Mystery cult of Demeter and Persephone. His father, Euphorion, is reported to have been of aristocratic birth, and it is at any rate certain that in later years the family followed the lifestyle of the leisured class: about a dozen surviving vase inscriptions, datable in or around the 440s, proclaim, in the traditional manner of Greek upper-class homoeroticism, the beauty of Aeschylus' younger son Euaeon.

Aeschylus made his debut in the tragic competition at the annual City Dionysia festival sometime between 499 and 496. Three outstanding practitioners, Pratinas, Choerilus and Phrynichus, were already active, and the newcomer was not to win first prize for another twelve or fifteen years. It is uncertain whether any plays from this early period of his activity were preserved for posterity to read: of the work of Phrynichus, far more popular at the time, only some late plays seem to have survived into later generations. Perhaps it was not until a few years later, possibly in the early or middle 480s, that the scripts of tragic dramas began to be copied and preserved.

Before then, and before Aeschylus at last reached the top rank of his profession in 484, when he won the City Dionysia tragic competition for the first time, had come what he himself seems to have regarded as the defining event of his life: the defeat of the Persians at the battle of Marathon in 490. Aeschylus fought in the battle, and one of the 192 Athenian dead was his brother: 'In this struggle... Cynegeirus son of Euphorion seized hold of an enemy ship by the sternpost, and fell when his hand was severed by an axe' (Herodotus, *Histories* 6.114). Aeschylus is also reported to have taken part in the battles of Salamis and Plataea in 480/79; this is plausible enough, since Athens put forth its maximum effort in both campaigns, and his presence at Salamis is confirmed by a contemporary who knew him personally, Ion of Chios. This gives his account of the battle in *The Persians*, produced eight

years later, a unique status: there is perhaps no other battle in ancient history of which we possess a substantial eyewitness account written down so soon after the event for the ears of an audience most of whom had been eyewitnesses themselves.

From 484 to the end of his career, Aeschylus won first prize thirteen times in all;¹ especially after the death of Phrynichus, he may have been victorious almost every time he competed. By now tragedy was becoming prestigious enough for an embryo reading public to have come into existence, perhaps at this stage mainly confined to other literary artists in Athens and elsewhere, so that some scripts of plays from this period survived for later generations. We cannot, however, identify the plays concerned, since with one possible exception² we have no information that could enable us to date, even approximately, any particular Aeschylean play produced before 472.

It may well have been in 473 that Phrynichus died, after a career of some forty years; at any rate Aeschylus, feeling himself Phrynichus' successor, began his *Persians*, produced in the spring of 472, with a salute to Phrynichus' memory in the form of a near-quotation of the opening line of *his* play of a few years earlier on the same theme. This production by Aeschylus, financed by the young Pericles, won first prize.

There is ancient evidence, going back to Eratosthenes (third century BC), that *The Persians* was produced again at Syracuse under the auspices of its ruler Hieron; there is reason to believe that this visit took place in 470 and that it also featured the production of *The Women of Aetna*. This was the year when Hieron, on winning the chariot race at the Pythian Games, caused his name to be proclaimed not as 'Hieron of Syracuse' but as 'Hieron of Aetna' – Aetna being the name (taken from that of the volcano) he had given to the city of Catana (now Catania) when he had refounded and repopled it five or six years before. The lyric poet Pindar, celebrating Hieron's success in the ode now known as the *First Pythian*, recalled the victories achieved over the Persians by Athens at Salamis and by Sparta at Plataea and linked them with the almost simultaneous victory of Hieron and his brother Gelon over the Carthaginians at Himera as having 'pulled Greece back from grievous servitude'.³ It would chime very well with this publicity campaign on Hieron's part if he also sponsored productions, by the greatest dramatist of the day, of one play (maybe two) celebrating the recent victories over the 'barbarians'⁴ and

another providing the city of Aetna with the prestige of a mythological past. Perhaps one production was put on at Syracuse and the other at Aetna itself.

At about the same time, a new tragic dramatist, Sophocles, nearly thirty years younger than Aeschylus, was making his debut. Plutarch, in his *Life of Cimon* (8.8–9), tells a story set at the City Dionysia of 468. Sophocles, he says, was putting on his first production; there were quarrels and fierce partisanship among the spectators; the presiding magistrate, instead of selecting judges for the contest by lot as was usual, invited the ten generals (one of whom was Cimon) to act as judges, and they awarded the first prize to Sophocles. Plutarch implies, and the ancient *Life of Aeschylus* explicitly states, that Aeschylus was one of the defeated competitors. There is independent evidence that Sophocles won his first victory in 468, but the participation of Aeschylus in that contest may be a later ‘improvement’ of the story, as may be the claim that this was Sophocles’ first production: certainly Plutarch does not inspire our confidence here when he ascribes Aeschylus’ final departure from Athens (which did not occur till a decade later) to pique at this defeat! At any rate, in the following year, 467, Aeschylus won first prize with *Laius*, *Oedipus*, *Seven Against Thebes* and *The Sphinx*, defeating two sons of famous fathers, Aristias son of Pratinas (who competed with his father’s plays, Pratinas having presumably died not long before) and Polyphrasmon son of Phrynichus; and in an uncertain year, probably also in the 460s, he won with *The Egyptians*, *The Suppliants*, *The Danaids* and *Amymone*,⁵ defeating Sophocles and Mesatus. One play has survived from each of these two productions.

In the late 460s, substantial alterations seem to have been made both in the rules of the dramatic competition and in the physical environment in which it took place (see below, pp. xviii–xix), including the introduction of a third speaking actor.⁶ These changes are reflected in the *Oresteia*, produced in 458, and also in *Prometheus Bound*, whether that is a late play of Aeschylus or a work of another hand falsely ascribed to him.

The *Oresteia*, which won first prize at the City Dionysia in the spring of 458, appears to have been Aeschylus’ last production in Athens; it is also the only connected suite of Aeschylean plays to survive complete.⁷ Not long afterwards he again travelled to Sicily. As he was never to return, legends later grew up about his having become

estranged from his Athenian public, but no credence need be given to these. We do not know who invited him to Sicily (Hieron was now dead), nor how many cities he visited, nor what plays he produced, nor what plays he had prepared for production at Athens after his anticipated return; only that he died and was buried at Gela in 456/5. An epitaph is preserved which the ancient biographer of Aeschylus ascribes to ‘the people of Gela’, though another tradition held it to be by Aeschylus himself. It may be translated thus:

At Gela, rich in wheat, he died, and lies beneath this stone:
Aeschylus the Athenian, son of Euphorion.
His valour, tried and proved, the mead of Marathon can tell,
The long-haired Persian also, who knows it all too well.

One is entitled to be sceptical about the authenticity of ancient poets’ epitaphs (all the more so when they are said to have written them themselves), but in this case there is cause to be sceptical about scepticism. It is hard to believe that anyone at a *later* date would have concocted an epitaph for Aeschylus that made not even the most distant allusion to his art.⁸ Aeschylus, to be sure, can hardly have himself composed an epitaph that specified the place of his death; but it will probably have been commissioned by the Geloans from a member of his family, and its wording will have been in accordance with what his family knew had meant most to him, commemorating him not as a poet but as a loyal and courageous Athenian who had fought that Athens might still be free.

Scepticism is rather more in order about a number of other anecdotes, mostly undated, that figure in Aeschylus’ ancient biography. Only one of these is worth recording here, mainly because of its early attestation; it is referred to casually by Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics* (1111a8–10) as if already well known: ‘[The doer of an act] may not realize what he is doing; as people say they were “carried away while speaking”, or “did not know it was a secret” (as in the case of Aeschylus and the Mysteries).’ This implies that Aeschylus was at some time accused, formally or informally, of having divulged secrets, connected with the Mysteries of Demeter and Persephone at Eleusis, that were supposed to be concealed from all except initiates of the cult. An ancient commentator on Aristotle specifies five plays (none of which have survived) in which Aeschylus ‘seems’ to have done this, and quotes from Aristotle’s contemporary Heracleides Ponticus a sensational story of how Aeschylus narrowly escaped being put to death on stage for revealing such secrets, took refuge at the

altar of Dionysus, and was eventually put on trial and acquitted, 'mainly because of what he had done in the battle of Marathon'.

Eleusis was both Aeschylus' home town and the home of the Mysteries, and Aristophanes in *The Frogs* exploits this connection to good effect: the Chorus of the play is composed of initiates enjoying a blissful afterlife in a privileged region of Hades, and Aeschylus' prayer before his contest with Euripides is 'Demeter who nurtured my mind, may I be worthy of thy Mysteries' (*Frogs* 886–7). Some of the imagery in the *Oresteia* has been thought, probably rightly, to derive from this cult,⁹ though none of it is signalled as such (neither the Mysteries nor Eleusis nor even Demeter is mentioned anywhere in the trilogy), and none of it could reasonably be regarded as illicit divulgence, since no non-initiate could even be aware of its connotations. To judge by what Aristotle's commentator says about the five other plays, their sole connection with the Mysteries, so far as later scholars could discover, consisted in some more than passing references to Demeter.

There is thus no reason to believe that Aeschylus was guilty of what he is said to have been accused of. It does not follow, however, that the story of the accusation is pure legend. It has been well said that 'the adage that there is no smoke without fire is not applicable to the Athenian law courts'.¹⁰ There is good reason to believe that Aeschylus was a politically committed dramatist and a supporter successively of Themistocles, Ephialtes and Pericles;¹¹ in the tense atmosphere of, say, the middle and late 460s, when Ephialtes and Pericles were seeking to undermine the ascendancy of Cimon through prosecutions,¹² it is not inconceivable that Cimon or one of his associates tried to attack his rivals indirectly through a prosecution of a man in the public eye who was well known to be an associate of theirs, as twenty-five or thirty years later Pericles was attacked through prosecutions of friends of his who were well known to the public but not active in politics (the sculptor Pheidias, the philosopher Anaxagoras, Pericles' mistress Aspasia).¹³ If so, Aeschylus was acquitted; had he been convicted, the penalty would certainly have been death, as it was in later cases in which similar charges were brought. It will not have taken long for the story to acquire the legendary embroidery found in later accounts.

Various ancient sources preserve sayings ascribed to Aeschylus, of varying degrees of credibility. The best attested is one that has no connection with his art: 'When Aeschylus was watching a boxing contest at the Isthmian Games, and the spectators shouted out when

one of the boxers was hit, he nudged Ion of Chios and said “Do you see what training does? The man who was struck is silent, and the spectators cry out!” ’ (Plutarch, *Moralia* 79e). Ion was a versatile fifth-century writer (of tragedy, among much else) who published a collection of reminiscences of famous people he had met; he was probably born in the late 480s and first visited Athens in the 460s.¹⁴ Our story implies that he and Aeschylus were visiting the Isthmian Games together, which suggests that they had become close friends.

The other sayings attributed to Aeschylus all relate to his art. Some of them are commonplaces that might fit any poet, but two have a degree of individuality. One tells of his polite refusal to compose a paean for the people of Delphi:

He said that there already existed an excellent one composed by Tynnichus, and that to put one of his own beside it would be like comparing a modern cult statue with an ancient one. The old images, crudely made as they were, were reckoned divine; the new ones, made with great artistry, were admired but did not give the same impression of divinity (Porphyry, *On Abstinence* 2.18).

The other is the only substantive comment he is recorded as having made on his tragedies: that they were ‘slices of fish taken from the great banquets of Homer’ (Athenaeus, *Sophists at Dinner* 8.347d). Both of these may perhaps likewise come from Ion of Chios. A small point in favour of their authenticity is that they share a tone of good-humoured self-deprecation. We do not know whether Aeschylus ever actually wrote paeans or other free-standing lyric poems, but in the Hellenistic period there circulated under his name at least two elegiac epitaphs and also a longer elegy in honour of those who died at Marathon. Different sources give figures ranging from seventy to ninety for the number of plays that Aeschylus composed. We know of eighty titles of plays attributed to him. It is sometimes uncertain whether two of these titles may not really be alternative names for the same play, and there is some evidence that there were one or two other Aeschylean plays whose titles happen not to be mentioned in our sources; all things considered, there appear to have been seventy-seven or seventy-eight plays known to scholars of the Hellenistic age which they regarded as the work of Aeschylus.¹⁵ One or two of these, notably *The Women of Aetna*, may never have been produced at Athens; the remaining seventy-six would be enough to make up nineteen four-play productions to compete at the City Dionysia festival, and, as we would expect from the regular practice of that competition (see below, p. xix), precisely nineteen out of the seventy-

six appear to have been satyr plays and the remainder tragedies (that is, serious dramas, not necessarily ending in disaster).

THEATRE, PERFORMANCE, COMPETITION

Aeschylus' earlier plays, including *The Persians*, *Seven Against Thebes* and *The Suppliants*, were performed under very simple conditions. The performing area consisted mainly of a dance floor (*orchestra*) large enough to accommodate comfortably the chorus (then consisting of twelve members, who normally marched and danced in a rectangular formation), the two actors playing individual roles, and any mute extras who might be needed. Somewhere in, or at the edge of, the *orchestra* there seems to have been an elevated mound, identified in *The Persians* as the tomb of Darius, in the other two plays as a sanctuary. The impression of an indoor scene could be given, when necessary, by setting out furniture, as apparently at the beginning of *The Persians* and also, we are told, in an earlier play by Phrynichus on the same subject. At each side of the *orchestra* was a passage by which performers could enter and leave.

In *Prometheus Bound* there are three actors (though only in the opening scene), and the theatrical arrangements are significantly more elaborate – though this does not in itself prove that the play is post-Aeschylean, since most if not all of the innovations are already to be found in the *Oresteia*. Some of the details are obscure and controversial, especially as regards the movements of the Chorus and the final cataclysm, but the evidence of many other plays makes the essentials clear. There was now a building (*skene*) behind the *orchestra*, which could be decorated with painted panels so as to represent a palace, a private house, a cave and so on; in *Prometheus* it represents the cliff to which Prometheus is bound. There were also two 'special effects' devices; one of these, the *ekkyklema* for the display of indoor scenes, is probably not used in *Prometheus*, but the other, the *mechane*, or flying-machine (also called, significantly, the *geranos*, or 'crane'), was certainly used for the arrival and departure of Oceanus on his 'four-legged bird'.

The performers, all of whom were male,¹⁶ were so attired that no part of their bodies was visible: they wore headpieces (combinations of masks and wigs) suited to the sex, status, age and so on of the

characters they were impersonating, and close-fitting bodysuits over which they put on appropriate costumes. Aeschylus had, at least in later generations, a reputation for grandeur in costuming (Aristophanes, *Frogs* 1060–2), but he was quite capable of dressing a king in rags if the situation so demanded, as in the case of Xerxes.

It was regular in the fifth century for each dramatist competing for the tragic prize at the City Dionysia to produce four plays, normally three tragedies followed by a satyr drama, and Aeschylus and his contemporaries seem often to have composed for this purpose connected ‘tetralogies’ consisting of three tragedies presenting successive episodes of a single story and a satyr drama based on another part of the same or a very closely related myth. Thus in addition to the *Oresteia*, on the story of the murder of Agamemnon and the revenge taken by his son Orestes, Aeschylus composed a tetralogy based on the *Iliad*, one based on the *Odyssey* and at least eight others. Two of the four plays in this volume, *Seven Against Thebes* and *The Suppliants*, are known to have formed part of such tetralogies; *Seven Against Thebes* was the third play of its suite and therefore the last in the sequence of tragedies, but *The Suppliants* came either first or second in its production, so that its ending is more like the end of an episode in a serial than the end of a complete drama. The three plays produced with *The Persians* had, on the face of it, no connection in plot or theme either with *The Persians* or with each other, but it is arguable that at least two of them, perhaps all three, looked forward to the great recent conflict to which the central play was devoted. With only one play surviving complete from each of these three productions, we cannot hope to capture their full artistic impact, but I have translated the surviving fragments of the lost plays from these productions and tried to give some idea of what else they are likely to have contained.

Many passages in *Prometheus Bound* make predictions, promises or threats about the future, and the surviving fragments of *Prometheus Unbound* show that most if not all of what the former play had foreshadowed came to pass in the latter; moreover the two plays show many similarities of style and technique. It is thus almost certain that they were produced together, but there are no plausible candidates for the remaining slots in a connected tetralogy.¹⁷ I have translated the fragments, and discussed the likely content, of *Prometheus Unbound*. Thus this volume contains altogether four complete plays and the fragments of ten others.¹⁸

AESCHYLUS' FAMILY AND HIS LATER REPUTATION

Aeschylus had two sons, Euphorion and Euaeon, both of whom themselves became tragic poets; Euphorion may indeed have been the real author of some of the plays that came to be attributed to his father (see below, pp. 159–60). The family's professional tradition was thereafter continued by Aeschylus' nephew Philocles (who defeated Sophocles when the latter produced *Oedipus the King*) and his descendants; one of these, Astydamos (II), was probably the most successful tragic dramatist of the mid-fourth century, and another, also named Astydamos (III), was a leading member of the Athenian actors' guild as late as 278/7.

After Aeschylus' death, a state decree was passed permitting anyone who wished to do so to produce his plays at the major dramatic festivals in competition with the works of living authors, and he may also, by the late fifth century, have become a school text.¹⁹ Before the fourth century was far advanced, however, Aeschylus had largely lost his popularity both in the theatre and with readers,²⁰ though he was still regarded as a classic, and when in the 330s an official text of the major Athenian tragic poets was deposited in the state archives, Aeschylus was included along with Sophocles and Euripides.

In subsequent centuries Aeschylus continued to be recognized as a major author but more as a pioneer than a supreme master, Sophocles and especially Euripides being far more popular; a typical judgement is that of the first-century Roman rhetorician and educationist Quintilian (*Institutio Oratoria* 10.1.66), who described Aeschylus as 'elevated, solemn and grandiloquent – sometimes even to a fault – but on the whole primitive and uncouth'. Papyrus fragments show that a wide range of Aeschylean plays was still being read in Egypt towards the end of the second century AD, but it is surely significant that almost all those we have, outside of the seven plays that survive complete, seem to come from one man's library in Oxyrhynchus. Two centuries later there can have been few collections like his in existence anywhere, and only the seven plays – the four in this volume, and the three tragedies of the *Oresteia* – survived into the early Middle Ages, and thence to our own time.

NOTES

1. Each production comprised four plays, so that fifty-two of Aeschylus' plays (perhaps about two-thirds of his total output) formed part of victorious productions.
2. This is the suite of plays (*The Myrmidons*, *The Nereids* and *The Phrygians*) based on the *Iliad*. These plays have often been thought to have inspired a series of vase paintings showing Achilles sitting muffled up in his cloak, as he is known to have done in at least one of the three plays. The paintings themselves cannot be precisely dated, but they tend to suggest that this was a fairly early production; indeed, it may well have been with this audacious series of dramas, aspiring to rival Homer himself, that Aeschylus won his first victory in 484.
3. See pp. 5–6, 49–52 on the possibility that Aeschylus worked into one of his other plays of 472, *Glaucus of Potniae*, a prophetic reference to the victory of Himera; if this is correct, of course, it is an almost inevitable inference that on this visit to Sicily Aeschylus produced *Glaucus of Potniae* too.
4. In an ancient Greek context 'barbarian' (*barbaros*) means 'non-Greek' or 'non-Greek-speaking'.
5. On the questions of the dating and sequence of the Danaid plays, both of which are disputed, see pp. 109–14.
6. Aristotle in the *Poetics* (1449a15–17) regards Aeschylus as having been responsible for the introduction, much earlier, of a *second* speaking actor.
7. Except for its final part, the satyr drama *Proteus*. The *Oresteia* is translated in this series by Robert Fagles, with an introduction and notes by Fagles and W. B. Stanford (1977).
8. In addition, the epitaph contains a feature of vocabulary (the use of *alsos*, which normally means 'grove' or 'sacred precinct', in the sense of 'level expanse') which is not found either before or after the fifth century BC and is particularly characteristic of Aeschylus.
9. See A. M. Bowie, 'Religion and Politics in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*', *Classical Quarterly* 43 (1993) pp. 10–31, at pp. 24–26, with references to earlier literature.
10. K. J. Dover, *Aristophanes: Clouds* (Oxford 1968), p. xx; *Aristophanes: Frogs* (Oxford 1993), p. 3.
11. See p. 6, and my fuller discussion in *Aeschylean Tragedy* (Bari 1996), pp. 391–421.
12. See Aristotle, *Constitution of Athens* 23.2; Plutarch, *Cimon* 14.3–5.
13. Plutarch, *Pericles* 31–2.
14. See M. L. West, 'Ion of Chios', *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical*

Studies 32 (1985), pp. 71–8; K. J. Dover, *The Greeks and their Legacy* (Oxford 1989), pp. 1–12.

15. Some of these may not in fact have been his work; see pp. 159–60; also M. L. West, *Studies in Aeschylus* (Stuttgart 1990), pp. 51–72, and ‘*Iliad and Aethiopis on Stage: Aeschylus and Son*’, *Classical Quarterly* 50 (2000), pp. 338–52.
16. It must often have been the case that the same actor took a male and a female part in the same play; thus in *Prometheus Bound* the actor who plays Io must earlier have played either Hephaestus or Power.
17. One might think of the satyr play usually referred to as *Prometheus the Fire-Kindler*, but that was part of the *Persians* production (see pp. 52–6).
18. These fragmentary remains of otherwise lost plays are of very varying extent. Of *Prometheus Unbound* we have in all, in Greek or in Cicero’s Latin, some 330 words of text; of *The Egyptians*, one single word.
19. In Plato’s discussion in the *Republic* (376c–398b) of the use and abuse of poetry in education, Aeschylus is the only individual poet other than Homer who is named or quoted; he can hardly have entered the school curriculum for the first time in the early fourth century, when he had gone almost completely out of fashion, so he is likely to have done so already in the fifth.
20. Aristotle’s *Poetics* naturally mentions Aeschylus in its potted history of the tragic genre (1449a 15–18) but otherwise almost ignores him.

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A Note on the Translation

On the literary and dramatic qualities of Aeschylean tragedy, the plays can be allowed to speak for themselves; but a few words are in order about the conventions of my translation.

The verse of Aeschylus' plays can be divided into four categories according to metre and mode of delivery:

- (1) Iambic trimeters (lines of six feet, normally twelve syllables), the normal metre of dialogue, spoken without any musical accompaniment;
- (2) Trochaic tetrameters (lines of eight feet, normally fifteen syllables), spoken or chanted in a stricter rhythm and accompanied (as were (3) and (4) below) by a single musician playing the double reed-pipe (*aulos*). In the plays contained in this volume, this type of verse occurs only in *The Persians* (lines 155–75, 215–48, 697–9, 703–58); it then disappeared almost completely from tragedy for over half a century (except for a short passage at the end of *Agamemnon*) but was extensively revived by Euripides from about 417 onwards;
- (3) Anapaests, with a strong and very strict 4/4 rhythm; these are often called 'marching anapaests' and in Aeschylus are regularly used by the Chorus at its first entrance (though not in *Seven Against Thebes*, where they enter in a panic and probably in no regular formation);
- (4) Sung lyrics, most often performed by the Chorus but sometimes taking the form of a lyric dialogue (*amoibaion*) between the Chorus and one or more actors (as with Xerxes at the end of *The Persians*); in *Prometheus Bound* Prometheus and Io both have solo songs ('monodies'), a feature that has often been regarded as indicating a late date. A very wide range of metrical patterns can be used, and in principle every song is metrically (and, one presumes, musically) unique. Lyrics are usually organized in paired stanzas, the two stanzas in each pair (the *strophe* and *antistrophe*, meaning 'turn' and 'counterturn') being metrically identical and, if their names are any guide, mirror-images of each other in their choreography. Compared with all the other modes, lyrics were

delivered in a different form of Greek, with some vowels pronounced differently (in what is conventionally called ‘choral Doric’¹) and a higher proportion of rare and archaic vocabulary.

In this translation, iambic trimeters and trochaic tetrameters are both rendered as prose, while anapaests and lyrics are both rendered as free verse. It should also be noted that where lines that I have rendered as prose are assigned to ‘Chorus’, they were probably in fact spoken or chanted by the leader of the Chorus alone, who thus functioned in effect as an additional actor. Like David Raeburn in his recent Penguin Classics translation of four plays of Sophocles, I have usually simply transliterated, rather than attempting to translate, the semi-articulate cries of sorrow or distress which abound in Greek tragedy and mostly have no natural English equivalent.

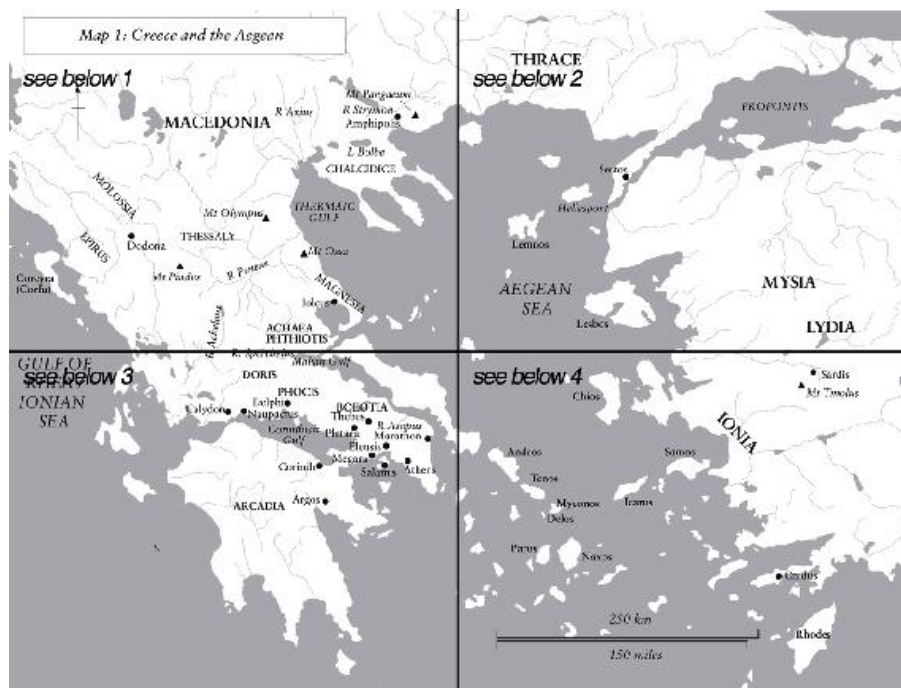
The stage directions inserted in the translation are not found in the Greek text; the movements and actions they specify are *inferred* from the words of the text and from the other information we possess about classical Athenian theatrical performance. To take two examples from early in *The Persians*: (1) A direction I give at the beginning of the play states that ‘twelve chairs are set out for a meeting of the royal council’. There is no mention of these chairs in the Greek text; but (a) the Chorus later decide to ‘sit down in this ancient building’ (141), (b) we know that in the early theatre a character who was to be imagined as sitting indoors could be seen seated on stage,² and (c) according to the ancient headnote (‘Hypothesis’) to *The Persians*, in a play by Phrynichus on the same theme the opening speaker had been a eunuch preparing chairs for a meeting of the state council. (2) The stage direction (after line 149) that the Queen arrives in a carriage, ‘magnificently attired and attended’, is based not on anything in that passage itself but on the Queen’s own statement, when she returns later in the play (607–8), that this time she has come ‘without my carriage and without my former luxury’. None of my stage directions, therefore, should be regarded, or cited, as if they were primary-source evidence.

Line numbers are given in the margin at every fifth line of the Greek text, and also to indicate when a section of text has been editorially transposed because it appears to have become displaced in the manuscript tradition. Sometimes, because of the requirements of English word and phrase order, the translation cannot render the lines sequentially; in such cases the marginal numbers are placed at the beginning of a stretch of two or three lines that has been translated as a unit (e.g. at *Persians* 4–5).

NOTES

1. Actually the vowel qualities in question were common to most dialects of Greek other than that of Athens (Attic) and its close cousin Ionic.
2. Aristophanes, *Frogs* 911–12 (Achilles); several vase paintings show a seated, muffled Achilles approached by envoys from the Greek army (compare General Introduction note 2). Later, after the creation of the *skene*, a character could be shown sitting indoors only by means of the *ekkyklema* (e.g. Ajax sitting among the beasts he has slaughtered, in the Sophoclean play bearing his name).

Maps



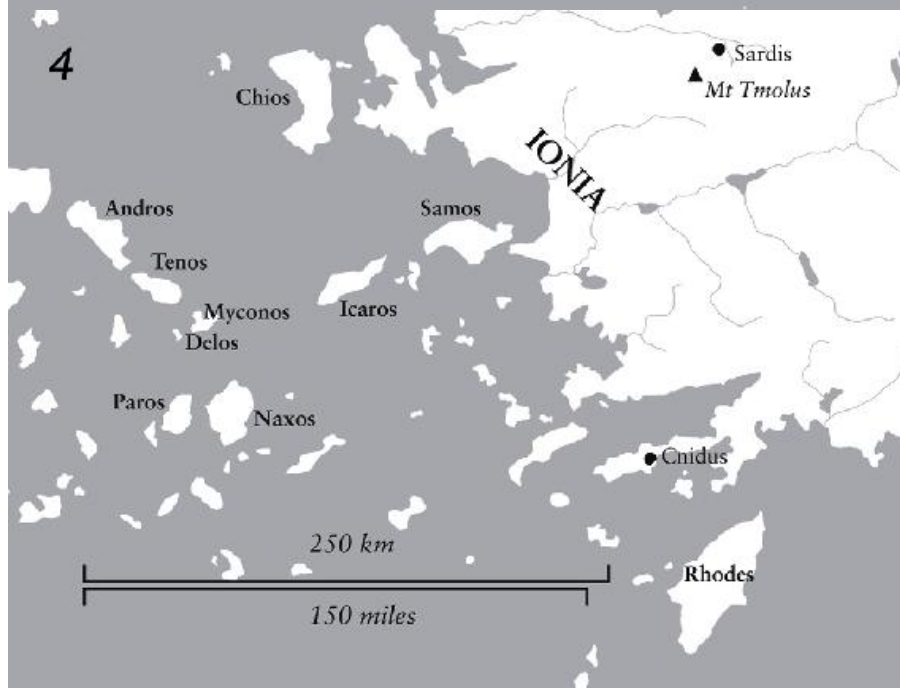
Map 1: Greece and the Aegean



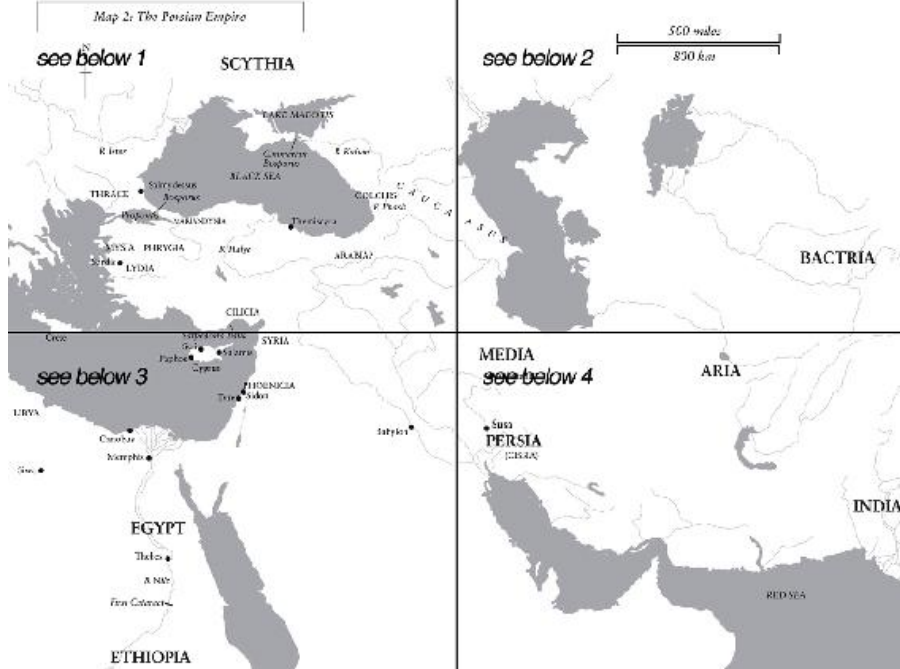
GULF OF RHEA / IONIAN SEA



4



Map 2: The Persian Empire



Map 2: The Persian Empire



2

500 miles
800 km



4 • Agbatana

ARIA

PERSIA
(CISSIA)

INDIA

RED SEA

THE PERSIANS

Preface to *The Persians*

According to the ancient headnote ('Hypothesis'), *The Persians* was produced in 472 BC, as the second play in a four-play production that won first prize; it is thus, if the currently accepted dating of *The Suppliants* to the 460s is correct, the earliest surviving European drama. The sponsor (*choregos*) who financed the production was none other than Pericles, later to be the greatest political leader of democratic Athens and then about twenty-three years old. Pericles' father, Xanthippus, had played a notable role in the Persian war. In 479, as Athenian naval commander (in succession to Themistocles), he had led the Athenian contingent at the victorious battle of Mycale. His Peloponnesian allies had then abandoned the campaign, but Xanthippus had gone on to capture Sestos on the Hellespont, and from there he had brought home to Athens, for dedication in a sanctuary, the cables of the bridge of boats by which Xerxes' army had crossed the straits.¹ It is doubtless no coincidence that our play has a great deal to say about this bridge.²

The Persians was not the first tragedy to take its subject from recent events instead of from those of heroic times. Aeschylus' great predecessor Phrynichus had done the same thing at least twice. In 493 or 492 he had produced *The Capture of Miletus*, highlighting the calamity that had befallen this famous Ionian city, a calamity for which many Athenians felt Athens was partly to blame, having withdrawn its support from the Ionians rebelling against Persian rule; for this Phrynichus was fined, and all further performance of the play was prohibited.³ Much later, probably in 476, Phrynichus had staged a production at least part of which was devoted to the Graeco-Persian war;⁴ he had invited his audience to view the war from the enemy's standpoint, not as a triumph for the Greeks but as a disaster for the Persians (and their subject nations). The plays, especially *The Phoenician Women*, were long remembered for the beauty of their lyrics.⁵ It is likely that Phrynichus' *choregos* for this production had been Themistocles, the hero of Salamis and creator of the fleet that

had gained victory there.⁶

Phrynichus probably died not very long before the production of *The Persians*. The opening words of Aeschylus' play are a near-quotation from the opening of the corresponding play of Phrynichus' production; it is unlikely that Aeschylus would have chosen to pay such a compliment to a living rival, and there is no evidence of Phrynichus being alive at any later date. Aeschylus thus was advertising that he was following in Phrynichus' footsteps, but we can be sure that his treatment of the theme was very different from that of his older contemporary.

In particular, whereas Phrynichus had spread the story over at least two (possibly three) plays,⁷ Aeschylus concentrated it into one. In the play of Phrynichus' production (probably *The Righteous Men*)⁸ whose opening line Aeschylus imitated, 'the defeat of Xerxes' – this must mean Salamis, the only Greek victory over the Persians at which Xerxes was present in person – was already known about in the Persian capital and was mentioned in the prologue speech; it is plausible therefore to suppose that *The Phoenician Women* came first, and that in the course of that play the Chorus learned of the disaster of Salamis and of their own widowhood. The depth of their grief, and the poignancy of its expression, can well be imagined. Perhaps in the following play, as Persia struggled to recover from Salamis (and with Xerxes now back home?), word may have arrived of the crowning catastrophe of Plataea.

Aeschylus ingeniously reshaped these elements into a new and much tauter package. He took from Phrynichus' *second* play the Chorus of Persian councillors, with a council meeting (140–45) as the first significant event, but like Phrynichus' *first* play, this one begins with the fate of Xerxes' expedition still unknown, and the shattering news of Salamis⁹ arrives in the course of the play. Few will then have expected to hear of Plataea too, but Aeschylus contrived to include it by having the ghost of Darius summoned up from below and making him deliver a precise prophecy of the coming defeat, even though he is represented as at first knowing nothing of what has happened at Salamis. Then, and only then, a humiliated Xerxes returns home, apparently in rags – in the sharpest contrast to the elaborate, costly robes of his councillors, and those in which we have just seen his father clad;¹⁰ the feminine laments with which *The Phoenician Women* so abounded are put in the mouths of the male Xerxes and the male

Chorus – for, as Edith Hall has shown, the image of the Persian male has been systematically feminized all through the play.¹¹

But although Aeschylus thus concentrated the substance of Phrynichus' two (or three) plays into one, he may nevertheless have suffused his entire production with the glow of the great Greek victory over the barbarian. The production of 472 is the only one by Aeschylus¹² that is known to have consisted of four plays whose stories were, on the face of it, unrelated – indeed, they were not even placed in proper chronological order. The first play was *Phineus*, about an episode in the saga of the Argonauts. This was followed by *The Persians*; then, jumping back to the heroic age, by *Glaucus of Potniae*, about a man who subjected his horses to an unnatural training regime¹³ and was devoured by them after crashing in a chariot race; and then by a satyr play about Prometheus (*Prometheus the Fire-Bearer* or *Fire-Kindler*).¹⁴ Repeated efforts have been made to find method behind the apparent madness of this arrangement, so far with little success.

I have recently suggested¹⁵ that the unifying feature of this production, or at least of its first three plays, was nothing other than the Persian war itself. In the first play, *Phineus*, a famous prophet, may have foretold the providential storm that wrecked much of the Persian fleet shortly before the simultaneous battles of Artemisium and Thermopylae in 480;¹⁶ that storm was the work of the North Wind (Boreas), and it was the sons of Boreas who saved *Phineus* from starvation by chasing away the Harpies who had constantly been snatching his food from his very lips. The third play, *Glaucus of Potniae*, seems to have included a reference to the town of Himera in Sicily; this place had nothing whatever to do with the story of *Glaucus* but had been the scene of a famous victory by the Sicilian Greeks over the Carthaginians in 480,¹⁷ so this play too may have contained a prophecy about a distant future which to its audience was the recent past.¹⁸ Thus each of the first three plays of this production would have narrated and/or foretold an important episode or episodes in the defeat of the great barbarian invasions of 480/ 79.¹⁹ We do not know enough about the fourth play to be able to determine whether it too followed this pattern.

The production of a tragedy (indeed, if the suggestion made above is correct, of a whole trilogy) about events of a war that was still in progress – a play, moreover, which, while it did not mention any

individual Athenian, alluded clearly enough to the exploits of Xanthippus and especially of Themistocles (353–63, not to mention the whole great narrative of his victory at Salamis) – has inevitably caused speculation as to whether it might have been designed to have some political impact, particularly in light of the earlier production by Phrynichus on the same subject. It is known that Themistocles was banished by ‘ostracism’ at some time in the late 470s, but it is not known precisely when; all the same, even if this occurred later than 472, it was probably not his enemies’ first attempt to get rid of him.²⁰ Both Themistocles and (when he entered politics) Pericles were opponents of the other outstanding political figure of this period, Cimon,²¹ who had gained great prestige in the previous few years by the capture of Eion and Scyros and the restoration to Athens of the bones of Theseus.²² So it is certainly not impossible that there was some political motivation behind the production of this particular play at this particular time.

There was certainly political motivation behind the restaging that took place at Syracuse, probably a year or two later, at the invitation of its tyrant Hieron.²³ Hieron had taken part in the victory of Himera alongside his brother Gelon (who had been the ruler of Syracuse at that time), and it is reasonable to suppose – though we have no actual evidence – that Aeschylus was asked to, and did, produce *Glaucus of Potniae* in Sicily as well.

The Persians is not, however, primarily a play about a Greek triumph; it is a play about a Persian disaster. The empire, so we are given to understand, has lost almost the whole of its young manhood, and the horrors are piled on: the bodies floating in the waters around Salamis or lying on its beaches (272–7, 306–17, 419–21, 568–78, 595–7, 965–6, 977), the helpless swimmers clubbed to death ‘as if they were tunny or some other catch of fish’ (424–8), the Persian élite corps hacked down to the last man (459–64), the ravages of hunger and thirst on the retreat (482–91), the drowning masses in the freezing-cold Strymon (504–7), the ‘heaps of corpses’ at Plataea (818) – and so far as we (or the Persians back home) are told, all these thousands of dead were left unburied.²⁴ But while full credit is given to the courage and patriotism of the Greeks,²⁵ the defeat is not presented as being due to any inherent Persian or ‘barbarian’ inferiority. When the ghost of Darius advises the Persians not to march against Greece again, his reason is not that Persians cannot match Greeks in fighting qualities, but that ‘their country itself fights as their ally... by starving to death a multitude that is too vastly numerous’ (792–4); even at Salamis the Persian fleet is defeated only because it is caught in narrow waters when the crews are tired from a futile all-night patrol. The two

characters of whom we see the most, the mother of King Xerxes and the ghost of his deceased father, are both presented positively. The Queen is as loving a mother as can be found anywhere in the tragic corpus, and Darius, both when he is present on stage and when his past achievements are remembered, appears as a wise and glorious ruler, his notorious failures, especially the invasion of Scythia,²⁶ being ignored; all his predecessors likewise are presented in either favourable or neutral terms (765–73) – except the ‘disgrace[ful]’ Mardus, who was quickly removed (774–9). The Persian catastrophe is not due to the inherent characteristics of Persians but exclusively to the rashness of Xerxes and the advisers to whom he chose to listen. That, in turn, is largely due to Xerxes’ youth (782), which Aeschylus considerably exaggerates²⁷ – though also to the Persian political system, in which the King was an absolute ruler who could not be held to account for any failure (213–14) and who (so the play assumes) was regarded by his subjects as a god (157, cf. 80; this special status of Persian royalty is signalled in this translation by the frequent capitalization of ‘king’ and ‘queen’). The Athenians, in contrast, ‘are not called slaves or subjects to any man’ (242) and function as a collectivity throughout: none of their leaders is named, not even Themistocles, whereas we are treated to three long catalogues of Xerxes’ subordinate commanders (21–59, 302–28, 957–99) containing about fifty different names.

Absolute monarchy, of course, was not unknown in the Greek world, and Aeschylus himself had grown up in an Athens ruled by the tyrant Hippias. And there are various indications that his audience were not expected to sit back and reflect smugly that this kind of catastrophic folly was only possible among benighted barbarians. In the Queen’s dream (181–99), the two women representing Greece and Persia are sisters (185–6), apparently equal in stature and beauty, differing only in their clothing and their willingness to submit to servitude: that one of them is ‘Greek’ and the other ‘barbarian’ is due merely to the ‘fall of the lot’ (186–7). We have already been reminded that Xerxes himself is actually of Greek ancestry, a descendant of Perseus ‘begotten of gold’ (79–80). And the sonorous list of territories gained by Darius and lost by Xerxes (868–903) corresponds almost exactly²⁸ to the regions whose Greek cities, by 472, had become members of an alliance (now often called the ‘Delian League’) under the hegemony of Athens. If Athens was now following Persia’s path to glory, might it later follow Persia’s path to disaster?

The answer might seem obvious. Xerxes – as his mother, his father and the Chorus agree – had committed an act of mad foolishness when, disregarding his father’s instructions, he had invaded Europe

when Persia's destiny was to rule over Asia. But neither in actual history, nor in the edited version of history with which Aeschylus presents us was it obvious to anyone without the blessings of hindsight. In the catalogue of lost territories just mentioned, sixteen of the twenty areas named are across the sea from Asia – either on islands or on the European mainland – and three more are partly so;²⁹ in other words, and even ignoring the Scythian expedition, most of what Xerxes had done Darius had done also. Nor could any Athenian forget – and Aeschylus reminds them several times (236, 244, 287–9, 475) – that Darius had sent an expedition against Athens too, the expedition that had been defeated at Marathon. How was Xerxes to know that his attempt to conquer Greece was against the will of the gods? We hear of no warning they had given him, only of his father's advice, and he knew as well as we do that his father was not infallible. The gods tempt men to overreach themselves, to their ultimate ruin (93–100), and they give men no sure way of knowing what is, and what is not, overreaching.³⁰ Any individual, or any community,³¹ with Xerxes' power might find themselves making Xerxes' error, if the gods were so minded. With at least some of his audience, Aeschylus may well have succeeded in the seemingly impossible feat of inducing them to feel compassion and pity for the man who had sacked and burned Athens, and for the great nation which, in the play,³² he brings to ruin.

NOTES

1. Herodotus 8.131.3; 9.90–106, 114, 120–21 (the dedication of the cables is the very last event in his main narrative).
2. *Persians* 65–73, 112–13, 130–31, 722–5, 745–50.
3. Herodotus 6.21.2. Presumably the prohibition referred to possible performances at local festivals; it was to be many years before anyone thought of producing the same play a second time at the City Dionysia itself.
4. Our sources, including the 'Hypothesis' to *The Persians*, mostly refer in this connection to Phrynichus' *Phoenician Women*, but the list of his plays in the medieval lexicon, the *Suda*, also mentions another play for which it offers three alternative titles – *The Righteous Men*, *The Persians* and *The Committee* (lit. 'men sitting together'). Probably the title *The Phoenician Women*, being that of the best-known play in the production, was sometimes applied to the whole of it.
5. Cf. Aristophanes, *Wasps* 219–20 (produced in 422).

6. It is known that Phrynichus won a victory, with Themistocles as *choregos*, in this year (Plutarch, *Themistocles* 5.5); there is no proof that this victory was gained with his Persian war plays, but the parallel with Pericles' sponsorship of Aeschylus' production, and the unlikelihood that a shrewd politician like Themistocles would miss the opportunity for self-promotion that such a production on such a subject would provide, raise a strong presumption that it was.
7. That our sources tell us of only two relevant plays of his is of no significance: we only know the titles of ten plays of Phrynichus altogether, from a career that may have lasted nearly forty years.
8. The 'Hypothesis' says it was *The Phoenician Women*, but the scene it describes, with a eunuch 'spreading < fleeces or textiles over > chairs for the assessors of the ruling power', is clearly one of preparation for a meeting of Persian councillors and surely therefore must come from the play that was named after them.
9. All the more shattering because, up to that point, the Persians at home seem entirely unaware that the Greeks have a navy at all; we have heard of the Persian fleet (19, 39, 55, 76, 83), but the Greeks are thought of simply as spear-fighters (85, 148–9, 240), and the information about Athens which the elders give the Queen (231–44) includes not a word about ships.
10. There has earlier been a similar contrast between the robes of the Queen at her first, vehicle-borne entrance (150ff.) and the simple garb in which she returns, 'without my carriage and without my former luxury' (607–8).
11. See E. M. Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian* (Oxford 1989), pp. 81–6 (cf. pp. 126–9, 209–10 on the effeminacy of the 'barbarian' in later Greek tragedy).
12. Though Aristias in 467 put on a production in which a *Perseus* was followed, with or without another play intervening, by a *Tantalus* – two heroes who had no mythical connection with each other at all except that both were sons of Zeus.
13. Either by feeding them on human flesh or by not allowing them to mate (the accounts vary).
14. For the principal fragments of these plays, and discussion of their likely content, see pp. 48–56.
15. 'The Persian War Tetralogy of Aeschylus', in J. Davidson and D. Rosenbloom, eds, *Greek Drama IV* (London forthcoming); an Italian version was published earlier in *Dioniso* n.s. 7 (2008).
16. Herodotus 7.188–92.
17. On the same day, it was believed, as the victory over the Persians at Salamis (Herodotus 7.166). Some contemporary Greeks too may already have believed, as some later Greeks certainly did

(Diodorus Siculus, *Historical Library* 11.1.4–5), that the Persians and the Carthaginians had preconcerted their simultaneous attacks on the independent Greek states of Greece and Sicily respectively.

18. The speaker may have been Poseidon, the god of all things equestrian; his relevance to the story of Glaucus is obvious, and we know that at Himera the Carthaginian commander, Hamilcar, had been killed while making a sacrifice to him – killed, too, by Syracusan *cavalry* (Diodorus Siculus, *Historical Library* 11.21.4–22.1).
19. Salamis, Plataea and Himera are likewise mentioned together in Pindar's *First Pythian* (75–80), performed before Hieron of Syracuse (brother of the victor of Himera) at his newly founded city of Aetna in 470.
20. Before any particular individual could be ostracized (banished for ten years without loss of property), three hurdles had to be surmounted: (i) the Assembly had to vote that an ostracism be held; (ii) at a special Assembly held some two months later, a total of at least six thousand votes had to be cast; (iii) the person who had the most votes against him would then be ostracized. There may have been one or several attempts at ostracizing Themistocles which failed at the first or second hurdle, before the one that finally succeeded.
21. Who appears to have been a patron of Sophocles (Plutarch, *Cimon* 8.7–9; *Life of Sophocles* 5).
22. Thucydides 1.98.1–2; Plutarch, *Cimon* 8.5–7.
23. We know of this restaging from an ancient commentator on Aristophanes' *Frogs* (line 1028) who cites a treatise *On Comedies* by the great third-century scholar Eratosthenes.
24. This appears to be largely true. In wars between Greeks, it was usual for the winners of a land battle to grant the losers, on request, a truce to enable them to remove their dead for burial; but of Plataea we are told that the Persian dead were left where they lay until their flesh had rotted away or been stripped by animals and birds, after which the bones were 'brought together to one place' (Herodotus 9.83.2), with (apparently) the sole exception of their commander Mardonius, who was buried secretly, probably by a loyal Ionian Greek (Herodotus 9.84).
25. And not only the Athenians; the victory of Plataea, in which Aeschylus and many of his audience had fought, is ascribed in the play to 'the Dorian spear' (817), i.e. to the Spartans.
26. See Herodotus 4.1–142.
27. If we had no other source of information, we would certainly suppose from Aeschylus' presentation of Xerxes that he was in his twenties when he invaded Greece; in fact he was the first

legitimate son born to Darius after Darius came to the throne in 521 (Herodotus 7.2.2) and cannot have been far short of forty in 480.

28. With the exception of Cyprus (894–6).
29. The regions of the Hellespont, the Propontis and ‘the mouth of the Black Sea’ (876–9), all of which had Greek communities both on the European and on the Asian sides. The only wholly Asian region in the list is Ionia (897–900).
30. Cf. A. F. Garvie, *Lexis* 17 (1999), pp. 21–40.
31. Aeschylus knew that communities, including democratic communities, are as subject to the temptations and the arrogance of power as individuals are: ‘... what man,’ he makes the Furies sing in *The Eumenides* (522–5), ‘that does not at all nourish his heart on fear – *or what community of men, it makes no difference* – will still revere Justice?’
32. In reality, of course, the Persian Empire remained very much a going concern, despite the losses of territory and revenue it had suffered on its western fringes.

Characters

CHORUS *of Persian elders of the King's council*

QUEEN, *widow of Darius and mother of Xerxes*

MESSENGER

GHOST OF DARIUS, *the late King of Persia*

XERXES, *the present King of Persia*

[Scene: Susa. Twelve chairs are set out for a meeting of the royal council. A mound (ignored until attention is drawn to it) represents the tomb of Darius. One side-passage is imagined as leading to the city and palace, the other towards the west and Greece. Enter CHORUS from the direction of the city.]

CHORUS:

Of the Persians, who have departed
for the land of Greece, we are called
the Trusted,
the guardians of the wealthy palace
rich in gold,
whom our lord himself, King Xerxes
son of Darius, chose by seniority
to supervise the country.
But by now the spirit within me,
all too ready to foresee evil, is
troubled
about the return of the King
and of his vast army of men;
for all the strength of the Asiatic race
has departed, and <in every house
the woman left behind > ¹ howls for
her young husband;
and no messenger, no horseman,
has come to the Persian capital.
They left the walls of Susa and
Agbatana²
and the ancient ramparts of Cissia³
and went, some on horseback,
some on board ship, and the marching
infantry
providing the fighting masses.
Such were Amistres and Artaphrenes
and Megabates and Astaspes,⁴
marshals of the Persians,
kings subordinate to the Great King,
who have sped away – overseers of a
great army,

slayers with the bow or riders of the
 horse,
 terrifying to behold and fearsome in
 battle
 in the steadfast self-confidence of their
 hearts;
 and Artembares the charioteer
 and Masistres, and brave Himaeus
 the archer, and Pharandaces,
 and Sosthanes, driver of horses.
 The great, nurturing stream
 of Nile sent others: Susiscanes;
 the Egyptian-born Pegastagon;
 great Arsames, the ruler
 of holy Memphis, and Ariomardus
 who governs ancient Thebes;
 and dwellers in the marshes,⁵ rowing
 ships,
 formidable and in numbers past
 counting.
 Following them are a mass of Lydians
 of luxurious lifestyle, who control
 every race
 born on the mainland;⁶ Mitragathes
 and brave Arcteus, kingly
 commanders,
 and Sardis, rich in gold, urge them
 forth,
 riding in many chariots,
 squadrons with two poles and with
 three,⁷
 a fearsome sight to behold;
 and those who dwell near holy
 Tmolus⁸ are eager
 to⁵⁹ impose the yoke of slavery on
 Greece,
 Mardon and Tharybis, anvils of the
 spear,⁹
 and the javelin-men of Mysia.¹⁰ And
 Babylon,
 rich in gold, sends forth a mixed
 multitude
 in a long, trailing column, men on
 board ships

and men trusted for their bravery as
archers;
and the sabre-carrying host
from all Asia follows
at the awesome summons of the King.
Such is the flower of the men of
Persia's land
that has departed,
for whom the whole land of Asia,
which reared them, sighs with a
longing that burns,
and parents and wives count the days
and tremble as the time stretches out.

The city-sacking¹¹ army of the King
has now passed over to the neighbour
land on the other side of the water,
crossing the strait of Helle,¹² daughter
of Athamas,
by means of a boat-bridge tied
together with flaxen cables,
placing a roadway, fastened with
many bolts, as a yoke on the neck
of the sea.

The bold ruler of populous Asia
drives his divine flock over the whole
world
on both elements, trusting in
commanders stout and rugged,
those who govern the land force and
those at sea –
a man equal to the gods, from the race
begotten of gold.¹³

With the dark glance
of a deadly serpent in his eyes,
with many hands and many ships,
driving a swift Syrian chariot,
he leads a war-host that slays with the
bow
against men renowned for spear-
fighting.

No one can be counted on to
withstand
this great flood of men
and be a sturdy barrier to ward off
the irresistible waves of the sea:
none dare come near the army
of the Persians and their valiant host.

For Destiny long ago prevailed
by divine decree, and imposed on the
Persians
the fate of conducting wars
that destroy towered walls, clashes
of chariots in battle and the uprooting
of cities;

and they have learned to cross the
level expanse
of the sea, when its broad waters
are whitened by rough winds,
trusting in cables made of thin strands
and in devices for transporting an
army.¹⁴

But what mortal man can escape
the guileful deception of a god?
Who is so light of foot
that he has power to leap easily away?
For Ruin begins by fawning on a man
in a friendly way
and leads him astray into her net,
from which it is impossible for a
mortal to escape and flee.

For that reason, my mind
is clothed in black and torn with fear:
‘Woe for the Persian army!’ –
I dread that our city may hear this cry
–

‘The great capital of Susiana is
emptied of its manhood!’ –

and that the city of the Cissians
will sing in antiphon,

a vast throng of women
howling out that word 'Woe!'
and their linen gowns will be rent and
torn.

For all the horse-driving host
and the infantry too,
like a swarm of bees, have left the
hive with the leader of their army,
passing over the projecting spur¹⁵ that
belongs to both continents
and yokes them together across the
sea.

And beds are filled with tears
because the men are missed and
longed for:

Persian women, grieving amid their
luxury, every one,
loving and longing for her husband,
having sent on his way the bold
warrior who was her bedfellow,
is left behind, a partner unpartnered.

But come, Persians, let us sit down
in this ancient building¹⁶
and take good thought and deep
counsel –

for there is pressing need to do so.

[They take their seats.]

So how is King Xerxes

son of Darius faring?

Is the bent bow victorious,

or has the power

of the spearhead's point conquered?

[A carriage is seen approaching.

Seated in it is the QUEEN,

magnificently attired and attended.

The CHORUS rise.]

CHORUS:

But look, here comes the mother of
the King,
my Queen, a light as brilliant as that
which shines
in the eyes of the gods! I fall down

before her –

[*The CHORUS prostrate themselves.*]
and it is right that we all address her
with words of greeting.

[*The CHORUS rise to their feet, and
their leader addresses the QUEEN as
she descends from her carriage.*]

¹⁵⁵All hail, my Queen, most exalted
among the slim-waisted women of
Persia, venerable mother of Xerxes
and wife of Darius! You were the
spouse of one who was a god to
the Persians, and you are the
mother of their god too, unless our
old protecting power has now
changed sides against our army.

¹⁶⁰ QUEEN: It is for that reason that I
have come here, leaving my gold-
bedecked palace and the
bedchamber I once shared with
Darius, and that my heart is torn
by anxiety. I will tell you a saying
which is not my own creation
<but has come down from our
ancestors, and which causes me to
be> very fearful, my friends: that
great wealth may make the dust
rise from the ground by tripping
up the prosperity¹⁷ that Darius, not

¹⁶⁵without the aid of some god, had
built up. For that reason there is in
my mind an indescribable anxiety,
a twofold one. For those who are
without wealth, the light of success
does not shine in proportion to
their physical power; but neither
do men revere and honour an
accumulation of wealth without
men to defend it.¹⁸ Our wealth is
ample, but I fear for

¹⁷⁰our very eye; for I consider the
master, when present, to be the
eye of his house. In view of this,

considering the situation to be as I have said, be my counsellors about this matter, you venerable, trusty Persians; for all the good advice I receive comes from you.

175 CHORUS: Be well assured, Queen of this land, that you do not

have to tell us twice to do any service in word or deed, so far as our ability permits: we on whom you call for advice are your loyal friends.

180 QUEEN: Dreams of the night have been my frequent companions

ever since my son led out his army and departed in order to lay waste the land of the Ionians;¹⁹ but never yet have I had one that was so plain as during the night just past. I will tell you about it. There seemed to come into my sight two finely dressed women, one arrayed in Persian, the other in Doric robes,²⁰ outstandingly superior in stature to the

185 women of real life, of flawless beauty and sisters of the same stock: one, by the fall of the lot, was a native and inhabitant of the land of Greece, the other of the Orient.²¹ I seemed to see these two raising some kind of strife between themselves;

190 my son, perceiving this, tried to restrain and calm them, yoked them under his chariot, and passed the yoke-strap under their necks. One of them, thus arrayed, towered up

194-5 proudly and kept her jaw submissively in harness, but the other began to struggle, tore the harness from the chariot with her hands, dragged it violently along

without bridle or bit, and smashed the yoke in half. My son fell out. His father, Darius, appeared, standing beside him and showing pity; but when Xerxes saw him, he tore the robes that clothed his
²⁰⁰body. That, I say, is what I saw in the night. When I had risen and washed my hands in a fair-flowing spring, I approached the altar with offerings in my hand, wishing to pour a rich libation to the deities who avert evil, for whom
²⁰⁵such rites are appropriate. Then I saw an eagle fleeing for refuge to the altar of Phoebus²² – and I was rooted speechless to the spot with terror, my friends. Next I saw a hawk swooping on him at full speed with beating wings and tearing at his head with its talons – and he simply cowered and
²¹⁰submitted. This was terrifying for me to behold, and must be terrifying for you to hear; for you know well that if my son were successful he would be a very much admired man, but were he to fail – well, he is not accountable to the community,²³ and if he comes home safe he remains ruler of this land.

²¹⁵ CHORUS: Mother, we do not wish to say what would make

you either unduly fearful or unduly optimistic. You should approach the gods with supplications and ask them, if there was anything sinister in what you saw, to ensure that it is averted but that what was good should be fulfilled for you, for your children, for the community and for everyone that

you care for. Secondly, you should pour drink-offerings to Earth and to the dead, and propitiate them with this prayer: that your husband Darius, whom you say you saw in the night, should send up to the light, from beneath the earth, blessings for you and your son, but that whatever is contrary to them be kept under the earth, ineffective, in the darkness. Using my intelligence²⁴ to prophesy for you, I give you this

²²⁵advice in all good will, and our interpretation of these signs is that things will turn out well for you in every way.

QUEEN: Yes, as the first interpreter of this dream you have

shown yourself loyal to my son and my house in the very definite words you have spoken. May what was good indeed be fulfilled! We shall make all these arrangements as you

²³⁰advise, towards the gods and towards our friends beneath the earth, when we return home. But there is something I wish to learn, my friends. Where in the world do they say that Athens is situated?

CHORUS: Far away, near the place where the Lord Sun declines and sets.

QUEEN: And yet my son had a desire to conquer that city?

CHORUS: Yes, because all Greece would then become subject to the King.

²³⁵ QUEEN: Do they have such great numbers of men in their army?

²³⁶ CHORUS: And an army of a *quality* that has already done the Medes²⁵ a great deal of harm.²⁶

239 QUEEN: Why, are they distinguished
for their wielding of the drawn
bow and its darts?

240 CHORUS: Not at all; they use spears
for close combat and carry shields
for defence.

237 QUEEN: And what else apart from
that? Is there sufficient wealth in
their stores?

238 CHORUS: They have a fountain of
silver, a treasure in their soil.²⁷

241 QUEEN: And who is the shepherd,
master and commander over their
host?

CHORUS: They are not called slaves
or subjects to any man.

QUEEN: How then can they resist an
invading enemy?

CHORUS: Well enough to have
destroyed the large and splendid
army of Darius.

245 QUEEN: What you say is fearful to
think about for the parents of
those who have gone there.

CHORUS: Well, it seems to me that
you will soon know the

[A MESSENGER *is seen approaching
from the west, in great haste.*]

whole story precisely. The way this
man runs²⁸ clearly identifies him as
Persian, and he will be bringing
some definite news, good or bad,
for us to hear.

250 MESSENGER: O you cities of the whole
land

of Asia! O land of Persia,
repository of great wealth! How all
your great prosperity has been
destroyed in a single blow, and the
flower of the Persians are fallen
and departed! [*To the* CHORUS:] Ah
me, it is terrible to be the first to
announce terrible news,

255 but I have no choice but to reveal

the whole sad tale, Persians: the
whole of the Oriental army has
been destroyed!

CHORUS:

Painful, painful, unheard of,
calamitous! *Aiai*, let your tears flow,
Persians,
on hearing this grievous news!

260 MESSENGER: I assure you, all those
forces are annihilated, and I myself
never expected to see the day of
my return.

CHORUS:

Truly this old life of ours
has proved itself too long,²⁹ when we
hear
~~this~~¹⁴⁵ sorrow beyond all expectation!

MESSENGER: And I can also tell you,
Persians, what kinds of horrors
came to pass; I was there myself, I
did not merely hear the reports of
others.

CHORUS:

Otototoi! It was all in vain
that those many weapons, all mingled
together,
~~went~~²⁷⁰ from the land of Asia to the
country
of Zeus,³⁰ the land of Hellas!

272 MESSENGER: Yes, our archery was of
no avail; the whole host

~~perished~~²⁷⁹, destroyed by the ramming of
ships.

CHORUS:

Otototoi, you are saying
~~that~~¹⁷⁵ the dead bodies of our loved ones
are floating, soaked and constantly
buffeted by salt water,
~~shrouded~~¹⁷⁷ in mantles that drift in the
waves!³¹

272 MESSENGER: The shores of Salamis,

and all the region near

¹⁷³them, are full of corpses wretchedly
slain.

CHORUS:

²⁸⁹Raise a crying voice of woe
for the wretched fate of <our loved
ones> ,
for the way <the gods> have caused
total disaster! *Aiai*, for our destroyed
army!

²⁸⁵ MESSENGER: How utterly loathsome is
the name of Salamis to my ears!
Ah, how I groan when I remember
Athens!³²

CHORUS:

She is indeed hateful to her foes:
we can remember well
how many Persian women they caused
to be bereaved and widowed, all for
nothing.³³

QUEEN [*to the* MESSENGER]: I have
been silent all this time

²⁹⁰because I was struck dumb with
misery by this catastrophe. The
event is so monstrous that one can
neither speak nor ask about the
sufferings it involved. Still, we
mortals have no choice but to
endure the sorrows the gods send
us; so

²⁹⁴⁻⁵compose yourself and speak,
revealing all that has happened,
even if you are groaning under the
weight of the disaster. Who has
survived, and which of the leaders
of the host must we mourn, who
after being assigned to hold a staff
of command perished and so left
his post deserted and unmanned?

MESSENGER: Well, Xerxes himself is

alive and sees the light of day –

300 QUEEN: To my house at least your
words come as a great relief,

MESSENGER: But Artembares, the
commander of ten thousand

like bright day shining out after a
pitch-dark night.

horse, is being pounded against the
rugged shores of Sileniae;³⁴

Dadaces, commander of a
thousand, was struck

³⁰⁵by a spear and took an effortless
leap out of his ship; and the
excellent Tenagon, a noble of the
Bactrians,³⁵ now wanders³⁶

^{308–10}around the wave-beaten island of
Ajax. Lilaëus, Arsames and
Argestes, these three vanquished
men, were beating their heads
against the hard rocks round the
island where doves breed,³⁷ as
were Pharnuchus, whose home
was near the stream of Egyptian
Nile, and three who fell from one
ship,

^{314–15}Arcteus, Adeues and Pheresseues,
leader of thirty thousand dark-
skinned horsemen. Matallus of
Chrysa,³⁸ commander of ten
thousand, perished; his full, bushy,
reddish beard got a soaking, and a
purple dye³⁹ changed the colour of
his skin. And Magus the Arab and
Artabes the Bactrian, now a
permanent resident in a harsh
country, perished there too;

³²⁰and Amistris, and Amphistreus,
who wielded a spear that caused
much trouble, and brave
Ariomardus, who dispensed grief
with his arrows, and Seisames the
Mysian; and Tharybis, admiral of
five times fifty ships, a Lyrnaean
by

birth⁴⁰ and a handsome man, lies wretchedly dead, having enjoyed no very good fortune. And Syennesis,⁴¹ foremost in courage, the leader of the Cilicians, who gave more trouble to the enemy than any other single man, met a glorious end.

³³⁰All this I report about the commanders; but I have mentioned only a small part of the great suffering that there was.

QUEEN: *Aiai*, this is truly the most towering disaster I have ever

heard of, a cause for shame and for shrill wailing to the Persians! But go back to the beginning and tell me this: how

³³⁵great were the actual numbers of the Greek ships, that they thought themselves capable of joining battle with the Persian fleet and ramming their vessels?

MESSENGER: I assure you that, so far as numbers are concerned,

the fleet of the Easterners would have prevailed. The Greeks had a grand total of about three hundred ships,⁴² and ten of

³⁴⁰these formed a special select squadron, whereas Xerxes – I know this for sure – had a thousand under his command, and those of outstanding speed numbered two hundred and seven.⁴³ Such is the reckoning; I hardly imagine you'll consider

³⁴⁵we were inferior in *that* respect in the battle! It was some divinity that destroyed our fleet like this, weighting the scales so that fortune did not fall out even: the gods have saved the city of the goddess Pallas.⁴⁴

QUEEN: Then the city of Athens is
still unsacked?

MESSENGER: While she has her men,
her defences are secure.⁴⁵

350 QUEEN: But tell me how the naval
battle began. Who started the

fight? Was it the Greeks or was it
my son, proudly confident in the
superior numbers of his fleet?

MESSENGER: The start of all our
sorrows, mistress, was the
appearance from somewhere of an
avenging demon or an

335 evil spirit. A Greek man came from
the Athenian fleet⁴⁶ and told your
son Xerxes that when the gloom of
black night should come on, the
Greeks would not stay where they
were but would leap on to the
benches of their ships and seek to
359–60 save their lives by taking flight in
all directions under cover of the
darkness. As soon as he heard this,
not understanding the deceit of the
Greek or the jealousy of the gods,
he proclaimed

364–5 the following order to all his
admirals. When the sun ceased to
burn the earth with its rays, and
darkness took hold of the celestial
regions, they were to arrange the
mass of their ships in three lines
and guard the exits⁴⁷ and the
surging straits, while stationing
others so as to surround the
370 island of Ajax completely;⁴⁸
because if the Greeks should
escape grim death by finding some
means of escaping unnoticed with
their ships, it was decreed that all
the admirals were to lose their
heads. So much he said, speaking
from a very cheerful heart, because
he did not understand what the

gods were about to do; and they,
obediently and in good

³⁷⁵order, prepared their supper, and
each crew member fastened his oar
by its loop to a thole-pin well
designed for good rowing. When
the light of the sun disappeared
and night

³⁸⁰came on, every master of the oar
and every man-at-arms⁴⁹ went on
board his ship; one rank
encouraged another all along each
vessel, and they sailed as each
captain had been directed. All
through the night, the masters of
the fleet kept the whole naval host
sailing to and fro. The night wore
on, but the Greek force did not
attempt a clandestine breakout in
any direction at all. Instead, when
Day with her white

³⁸⁵horses spread her brilliant light
over all the earth, first of all

³⁸⁹⁻⁹¹there rang out loudly a joyful
sound of song from the Greeks,
and simultaneously the echo of it
resounded back from the cliffs of
the island. All we Easterners were
terrified, because we had been
deceived in our expectation: the
Greeks were now raising the holy
paean-song,⁵⁰ not with a view to
taking

³⁹⁵flight but in the act of moving out
to battle, with cheerful confidence,
and the call of the trumpet was
setting the whole place ablaze. At
once, on a word of command, they
all pulled their oars together,
struck the deep seawater and made
it roar – and then suddenly they
were all there in plain sight. First
there was the right wing, leading
the way with good order

and discipline, and then the whole fleet coming on behind, and from all of them together one could hear a great cry: 'Come on, sons of the Greeks, for the freedom of your home-land, for the freedom of your children, your wives, the
⁴⁰⁵temples of your fathers' gods, and the tombs of your ancestors! Now all is at stake!' And likewise from our side there was a surge of Persian speech in reply; the time for delay was past. At once one ship began to strike another with its

⁴¹⁰projecting bronze beak; the first to ram was a Greek ship, which sheared off the whole stern of a Phoenician vessel, and then each captain chose a different enemy ship at which to run his own. At first the streaming Persian force resisted firmly, but when our masses of ships were crowded into a

⁴¹⁵narrow space, they had no way to come to each other's help, they got struck by their own side's bronze-pointed rams, they had the whole of their oarage smashed, and the Greek ships, with careful coordination, surrounded them completely and went on striking them. The hulls of our ships turned keel-up,

⁴²⁰and the sea surface was no longer visible, filled as it was with the wreckage of ships and the slaughter of men; the shores and reefs were also full of corpses. Every remaining ship of the Eastern armada was being rowed away in disorderly

⁴²⁴⁻⁶flight; meanwhile the enemy were

clubbing men and splitting their
spines with broken pieces of oars
and spars from the wreckage, as if
they were tunny⁵¹ or some other
catch of fish, and a mixture of
shrieking and wailing filled the
expanse of

⁴²⁹⁻³⁰the sea, until the dark face of night
blotted it out. Our sufferings were
so multitudinous that I could not
describe them fully to you if I were
to talk for ten days on end: you
can be certain that never have so
vast a number of human beings
perished in a single day.

QUEEN: *Aiai*, what a great sea of
troubles has burst upon the

Persians and the whole Eastern
race!

⁴³⁵ MESSENGER: Well, be sure of this, the
tale of disaster is not yet

even half told: such a calamitous
event has occurred, on top of what
I have told you, that it outweighs
that in the scale fully twice over.

QUEEN: What possible misfortune
could be even more hateful

⁴³⁹⁻⁴⁰than the one we have heard of?
Tell us what you say is this further
disaster that has come upon the
army that weighs even more
heavily in the scale of evil.

MESSENGER: All those Persians who
were in their bodily

prime, outstanding in courage,
notable for high birth, and who
always showed the highest degree
of loyalty to the person of the
King, have perished shamefully by
a most ignoble fate.

⁴⁴⁵ QUEEN: Ah wretched me, my friends,
this terrible catastrophe! By what
kind of death do you say they have
perished?

MESSENGER: There is an island in
front of Salamis,⁵² small and

offering no good anchorage for
ships, whose seashore is a
⁴⁵⁰haunt of Pan,⁵³ lover of dances.
Xerxes sent these men there so
that, when shipwrecked enemy
men were trying to reach safety on
the island, they could kill the
Greek warriors when they were an
easy prey while rescuing their own
men from the straits of the sea; he
was reading the future badly.
When

⁴⁵⁵god had given the triumph in the
naval battle to the Greeks, that
same day they clad themselves in
stout bronze armour, leaped off
their ships and landed all around
the island, so that the Persians had
no idea which way to turn. They
were

⁴⁶⁰being heavily battered by hand-
thrown stones, and hit and killed
by arrows shot from the bowstring,
until finally the Greeks charged
them in a simultaneous rush and
struck them down, hacking the
wretched men's limbs until they
had extinguished

⁴⁶⁵the life of every one of them.
Xerxes wailed aloud when he saw
this depth of disaster; he was
seated in plain sight of the whole
army, on a high cliff close to the
sea. He tore his robes, uttered a
piercing cry of grief and
immediately

⁴⁷⁰gave an order to the land army,
sending them off in helter-skelter
flight. Such, I tell you, is the
disaster you have to mourn, in
addition to the previous one.

QUEEN: O cruel divinity, how I see

you have beguiled the minds

⁴⁷⁴⁻⁵of the Persians! My son has found his vengeance upon famous Athens to be a bitter one; the Eastern lives that Marathon had already destroyed were not enough for him. My son, in the belief that he was going to inflict punishment for that, has drawn upon himself this great multitude of sorrows. But tell me – those of the ships that escaped destruction – where did you leave them? Do you know enough to give us clear information?

⁴⁸⁰ MESSENGER: The commanders of the remaining ships took to headlong, disorderly flight, running before the wind. The rest of the host⁵⁴ suffered continual losses, first of all in the land of the Boeotians, some of them prostrated by thirst when close to a sparkling spring, <others by hunger>, while we survivors, out of breath and panting, passed on into the

⁴⁸⁵country of the Phocians and the land of Doris and came to the Malian Gulf, where the Spercheius waters the plain and
⁴⁸⁸⁻⁹⁰provides drink bountifully. From there the soil of Achaea⁵⁵ received us, and then the cities of Thessaly; we were very short of food, and very many died in those parts from thirst and hunger – we had both of them. Then we reached the land of Magnesia⁵⁶ and entered the country of the Macedonians,
⁴⁹⁵coming to the river Axius,⁵⁷ the reed swamps of Lake Bolbe⁵⁸ and Mount Pangaeum⁵⁹ in the land of Edonia. That night the god brought on an unseasonable cold snap and

froze the whole stream of holy
Strymon; and those who had never
before paid any regard to the gods
now addressed them with prayers,
making obeisance to earth and
heaven. When the

⁵⁰⁰ army had finished its many
invocations of the gods, it began to
cross the river, now solid ice.

Those of us who started across
before the Sun god scattered his
rays got over safely; for the
brilliant orb of the Sun, with his
blazing beams, parted

⁵⁰⁵ the ice in the middle of the
channel, heating it with his flames.

The men fell one on top of
another, and he was lucky, I tell
you, who broke off the breath of
life soonest. Those who

⁵⁰⁹⁻¹⁰ were left and had gained safety
crossed Thrace and have now, after
escaping with difficulty and with
much hard toil, returned to the
land of their hearth and home –
but not many of them; so that the
city of the Persians must grieve,
longing vainly for the beloved
youth of the land. All this is true;
and there is much that I have
omitted in my speech of the evils
that a god has brought down upon
the Persians.

[*Exit.*]

⁵¹⁵ CHORUS: O you god who has caused
such toil and grief, how very
heavily you have leaped and
trampled on the entire Persian
race!

QUEEN: Ah wretched me, our army
annihilated! O you clear dream-
vision of the night,

how very plainly you revealed
these disasters to me – and you

[*turning to the CHORUS*], in
⁵²⁰interpreting the dream, took it far
too lightly! All the same, since this
was your firm advice, I intend first
to pray to the gods; then I will
return, bringing from my palace a
rich
⁵²⁵libation as a gift to Earth and the
dead. I know that this is after the
event, but it is in the hope that
there may be something better to
come in the future. For your part,
it is your duty, in the light of these
events, to offer trusty counsel to us
who trust you; and if my son
comes here before I return,
⁵³⁰comfort him and escort him home,
for fear that he may add some
further harm to the harm he has
suffered.⁶⁰
[*She leaves by the way she came.*]

CHORUS:

O Zeus the King, now, now by
destroying
the army of the boastful
and populous Persian nation
⁵³⁵you have covered the city of Susa and
Agbatana
with a dark cloud of mourning.
Many <mothers in a piteous plight>
are rending their veils with their
delicate hands
and wetting the folds of their
garments till they are soaked
through
⁵⁴⁰with tears, as they take their share in
the sorrow;
and the soft, wailing Persian women
who yearn
to see the men they lately wedded,
abandoning the soft-coverleted beds
they had slept in,
the delight of their pampered youth,

grieve with wailing that is utterly
insatiable.

And I too shoulder the burden of the
death of the departed,
truly a theme for mourning far and
wide.

For now all, yes all, the emptied land
of Asia groans:

⁵⁵⁰Xerxes took them – *popoi!*

Xerxes lost them – *totoi!*

Xerxes handled everything unwisely,
he and his sea- boats.

Why did Darius for his part

⁵⁵⁵do so little harm when he was the
bowmaster

who ruled over the citizenry,
the dear leader of Susiana?

Land-soldiers and seamen –
the dark-faced, equal-winged⁶¹

⁵⁶⁰ships brought them – *popoi!*–

ships destroyed them – *totoi!*–

ships, with ruinous ramming,
and driven by Ionian hands!

⁵⁶⁵And the King himself,

so we hear, barely escaped,
over the wide plains

and wintry tracks of Thrace.

But those who were seized – *pheu!*–
by Necessity and made to die first –
ehhh-e!–

⁵⁷⁰⁻⁷¹how lie smashed – *o-aaah!*–

around the shores of Cychreus'⁶²
island. Groan

and bite your lips, and utter a deep
cry

of towering woe – *o-aaah!*–

a terrible, long-drawn-out howl,

⁵⁷⁵a screaming voice of sorrow.

Terribly lacerated by the sea – *pheu!*–
they are being savaged by the

voiceless children – *ehhh-e!*–
of the Undefined⁶³ – *o- aaah!*
Bereaved houses mourn their men,
⁵⁸⁰⁻⁸²and aged parents,
now childless – *o- aaah!*–
lament their god-sent woes
as they hear the news that brings
ultimate pain.

⁵⁸⁷⁻⁵Not long now will those in the land of
Asia
remain under Persian rule,
nor continue to pay tribute
under the compulsion of their lords,
nor fall on their faces to the ground
⁵⁸⁹⁻⁹⁰in awed obeisance; for the strength of
the monarchy
has utterly vanished.

Nor do men any longer keep their
tongue
under guard; for the people
have been let loose to speak with
freedom,
now the yoke of military force no
longer binds them.
⁵⁹³In its blood-soaked soil
the sea-washed isle of Ajax
holds the power of Persia.

*[The QUEEN returns, plainly dressed,
on foot and alone, carrying offerings
in a tray or basket.]*

QUEEN: My friends, anyone who has
experience of misfortune

⁶⁰⁰knows that in human affairs, when
one is assailed by a surge of
troubles, one is apt to be afraid of
anything; whereas when divine
favour is flowing your way, you
tend to be sure that the breeze of
good fortune will always continue
to blow from astern. So for me
now, everything is full of fear:
before my eyes there appear

hostile visions from the gods, and
 in my
⁶⁰⁵ears there resounds a din that is
 not a song of cheer – such is the
 stunning effect of these
 misfortunes that terrifies my mind.
 That is why I have retraced my
 path, coming back from my house
 without my carriage and without
 my former luxury,
^{609–10}bringing propitiatory drink-
 offerings for the father of my child,
 such as serve to soothe the dead:
 white milk, good to drink, from a
 pure⁶⁴ cow; the distilled product of
 the flower-worker,⁶⁵ gleaming
 honey, together with a libation of
 water
^{614–15}from a virgin spring; a drink that
 has come unsullied from its wild-
 growing mother, this juice of an
 old vine; and also here are the
 sweet-smelling produce⁶⁶ of the
 tree whose foliage never ceases to
 live and flourish, the blond olive
 tree, and a woven garland of
 flowers, the children of Earth the
 bearer
^{619–20}of all life. Now, friends,
 accompany these drink-offerings to
 the nether powers with auspicious
 songs and call up the divine
 Darius; meanwhile I will send
 these honours on their way to the
 gods below, by letting the earth
 drink them up.

CHORUS:

Royal lady, first in honour among
 the Persians, while you send the
 drink-offerings down to earth's
 inner chambers,
⁶²⁵we in song will beseech
 those with power to send up the dead

to be kind to us in their home beneath
the earth.

*[During the rest of this chant and
song by the CHORUS, the QUEEN is
pouring the drink- offerings at
Darius' tomb, with appropriate ritual
actions.]*

Now, you holy divinities of the
underworld,
Earth and Hermes and you, King of
the Shades,⁶⁷

⁶³⁰send that soul up from below into
the light;
for if he knows any further remedy for
our troubles,
he, alone of mortals, will tell us how
to end them.

Does he hearken to me – the blessed
King, equal to a god –

⁶³⁵as I send forth clearly in Eastern
speech

my variegated, grief-laden
cries that tell of woe?

Let me try to reach him, voicing
loudly

our wretched sufferings:
does he hear me from below?

⁶⁴⁰I pray you, Earth and you other
rulers of the underworld,

consent to this proud divine being
emerging from your abode –

the Persians' god, born in Susa –
and send him up here,

⁶⁴⁵one like no other
whom Persian soil has ever covered.

Truly we love the man, we love the
mound;

for it conceals a man of lovable
character.

⁶⁵⁰May Aidoneus release him and

send him up, Aidoneus –
the godlike ruler Darian!⁶⁸ *Ehhh-e!*

For he was never one to lose many
men
by disastrous slaughters in war;
the Persians called him ‘divine
counsellor’, and a divine
⁶⁵⁵counsellor
he was, for he guided the people well.
Ehhh-e!

*[During the next two stanzas the
CHORUS are on their knees, beating
and furrowing the ground with their
hands.]*

Ballên, our ancient *ballên*,⁶⁹ come,
come to us!
Come to the very summit of your
tomb mound,
⁶⁶⁰lifting up your feet in their saffron-
dyed slippers,
revealing the peak of your royal hat:⁷⁰
come hither, father Darian who never
harmed us – *oi!*–

⁶⁶⁵so that you may hear of terrible
recent sorrows.
Master, master, show yourself !
A cloud of Stygian gloom hovers over
us,
⁶⁷⁰for now all of our young men have
perished!
Come hither, father Darian who never
harmed us – *oi!*

[The CHORUS rise to their feet.]
Aiai, aiai!
You whose death was so much
bewailed by those who loved you,
⁶⁷⁵our lord, our lord, what does it
mean, what does it mean,
this ever-to-be- lamented twin
failure⁷¹ that has befallen us?

All the triple-oared ships⁷² this land
possessed have vanished away –
⁶⁸⁰they are ships no more, ships no
more!

[*The GHOST OF DARIUS appears above
his tomb.*]

GHOST OF DARIUS: Trusted of the
trusted, contemporaries of my
youth, elders of Persia, what
distress is our state suffering?

The earth is groaning, having been
beaten and furrowed; the
⁶⁸⁵sight of my wife close by my tomb
causes me fear, though I have
gladly accepted her drink-
offerings; and you are standing
round my tomb singing songs of
grief, lifting up your voices in
wailing to raise my spirit, and
calling on me in piteous tones. It
has not been easy to gain egress;
apart from
⁶⁹⁰anything else, the gods below the
earth are better at taking people in
than at letting them go;
nevertheless, holding as I do a
position of power among them, I
have come here. But be speedy so
that I am not blamed for the time I
have taken: What is the heavy
recent disaster that has happened
to Persia?
[*The CHORUS prostrate themselves.*]

CHORUS:

I am too awed to look upon you;
⁶⁹⁵I am too awed to speak before you,
because I feared you of old.

GHOST OF DARIUS:

But since it is your laments that
have induced me to come up from
below, speak now, not in long-
winded words but putting it
concisely and covering everything,

setting your awe of me aside.

CHORUS [*rising again to their feet*]:

⁷⁰⁰I am afraid to gratify your wish;
I am afraid to speak plainly,
saying things that are hard to say to a
friend.

GHOST OF DARIUS: Well, since your
old fear is standing guard over
your mind – [*turning to the QUEEN,
who seems wrapped up in her grief*] I
ask you, my noble wife, old
companion of

⁷⁰⁵my bed, to end this crying and
wailing and speak plainly to me.
Human beings, you know, are
bound to experience human
sufferings; there are many evils
that befall mortals, both by sea
and by land, if their life is
prolonged to a great span.

⁷¹⁰ QUEEN: You whose fortunate fate
surpassed all mortals in bliss, how
enviable you were when you saw
the light of the sun and led a life of
such happiness that Persians
looked on you as a god! And now
too I envy you, because you died
before seeing the depths of our
present suffering. It will take you
very little time, Darius, to hear the
whole story: to all intents and
purposes, the fortunes of Persia are
utterly ruined.

⁷¹⁵ GHOST OF DARIUS: How has it
happened? Has our state been
stricken by a virulent plague, or by
civil strife?

QUEEN: Not at all; what has
happened is that our entire army
has been destroyed in the region of
Athens.

GHOST OF DARIUS: And tell me, which
of my sons led the army there?

QUEEN: The bold Xerxes; he emptied
the whole expanse of the
continent.

GHOST OF DARIUS: And did the
wretched boy make this foolish
attempt by land or by sea?

720 QUEEN: Both; it was a double front
composed of two forces.

GHOST OF DARIUS: And how did a
land army of that size manage to
get across the water?

QUEEN: He contrived means to yoke
the strait of Helle, so as to create a
pathway.

GHOST OF DARIUS: He actually carried
that out, so as to close up the
mighty Bosphorus?⁷³

QUEEN: It is true. Some divinity must
have touched his wits.

725 GHOST OF DARIUS: Ah, it was a
powerful divinity that came upon
him, to put him out of his right
mind!

QUEEN: Yes, one can see by the
outcome what a disaster he
managed to create.

GHOST OF DARIUS: And what in fact
was the outcome for them over
which you are grieving so?

QUEEN: The naval force was savaged,
and that doomed the land army to
destruction.

GHOST OF DARIUS: Was the whole host
so utterly and completely
destroyed by the spear?⁷⁴

730 QUEEN: So that on account of this, the
whole city of Susa is grieving
because it is empty of men –

GHOST OF DARIUS: Ah me, our army,
our valiant aid and protector!

QUEEN: And the whole community of
the Bactrians is perished and gone,
with not one survivor.

GHOST OF DARIUS: Poor fellow, what

young manhood of our allies he
has lost!

QUEEN: And Xerxes himself, they say,
alone and forlorn, with only a few
men –

735 GHOST OF DARIUS: How did he finish
up, and where? Is there any chance
of his being safe?

QUEEN: – has arrived, to his relief, at
the bridge that joins the two lands
together.

GHOST OF DARIUS: And has come safe
back to our continent? Is that
really true?

QUEEN: Yes, that is the prevalent and
definite report; there is no dispute
about it.

GHOST OF DARIUS: Ah, how swiftly
the oracles have come

739–40 true! Zeus has launched the
fulfilment of the prophecies
against my son. I used to think
confidently, ‘I suppose the gods
will fulfil them in some distant
future’; but when a man is in a
hurry himself, the god will lend
him a hand. Now, it seems, there
has been discovered a fountain of
sorrow for all who are dear to me
– and it is my son, by his youthful
745–6 rashness, who has achieved this
without knowing what he was
doing. He thought he could stop
the flow of the Hellespont, the
divine stream of the Bosphorus, by
putting chains on it, as if it were a
slave; he altered the nature of its
passage,⁷⁵ put hammered fetters
upon it and created a great
pathway

749–50 for a great army. He thought, ill-
counselled as he was, that he, a
mortal, could lord it over all the
gods and over Poseidon. Surely

this was a mental disease that had my son in its grip! I am afraid that the great wealth I gained by my labours may be overturned and become the booty of the first comer.

QUEEN: The rash Xerxes, I should tell you, was taught this way of thinking by associating with wicked men. They said that

⁷⁵⁴⁻⁵whereas you had acquired great wealth for your children by warfare, he, from unmanliness, was being a stay-at-home warrior and doing nothing to increase the riches he had inherited. It was because he had heard taunts like that, over and over again, from these wicked men that he planned this military expedition against Greece.

⁶⁰ GHOST OF DARIUS: And so he has completed an immense, never-to-be-forgotten achievement; nothing else that has befallen this city of Susa has ever emptied it like this, since Lord Zeus first granted us this honour, that one man should be supreme over the whole of sheep-rearing Asia, wielding the sceptre of directive authority. Medus⁷⁶ was the first leader

⁷⁶⁵of our host, and his son also achieved this position. The third ruler in the succession from him was Cyrus,⁷⁷ a man blessed by the gods, who gave peace to all those he cared for, since

⁷⁷⁰his intelligence was in control of his fighting spirit; he gained mastery over the peoples of Lydia and Phrygia, and overran all of Ionia by force. God did not hate him, because he was wise. The son

of Cyrus⁷⁸ was the fourth to direct the host.

⁷⁷⁵The fifth ruler was Mardus,⁷⁹ a disgrace to his country and to his ancient throne. He was killed in his palace, by means of a crafty plot, by the admirable Artaphrenes⁸⁰ together with some friends who took on this duty, and with myself; and I

⁷⁸⁰gained by chance the lot I desired.⁸¹ And I invaded many lands with great armies, but I never inflicted on my state such harm as this. My son Xerxes, though, is still a young man, thinking young men's thoughts, and he has not kept my

⁷⁸⁵instructions in mind. I tell you this plainly, my old contemporaries: take all of us together who have held this kingship, and we will not be found to have caused this much suffering.

CHORUS: What then, Lord Darius? To what conclusion do your words lead? After this, how can we, the Persian people, get the best possible outcome for the future?

⁷⁹⁰ GHOST OF DARIUS: By not invading the land of the Greeks, not even with a Median army still greater than before! Their country itself fights as their ally.

CHORUS: How do you mean? In what way does it fight as their ally?

GHOST OF DARIUS: By starving to death a multitude that is too vastly numerous.

⁷⁹⁵ CHORUS: Well, we'll raise a picked, well-equipped expedition.

GHOST OF DARIUS: No, not even the army that has now been left in the land of Greece will gain a safe

return home.

CHORUS: What do you mean? Hasn't
the whole of the Eastern army
crossed back from Europe over the
strait of Helle?

800 GHOST OF DARIUS: Few out of many, if
one is to place any credence in the
oracles of the gods, looking at
what has now happened – for
oracles are not fulfilled by halves.
If that is indeed so, Xerxes,
seduced by vain hopes, has left
behind a

805 large, select portion of his army.
They remain where the Asopus⁸²
waters the plain with its stream,
bringing welcome enrichment to
the soil of the Boeotians. There the
destiny awaits them of suffering a
crowning catastrophe, in requital
for their outrageous actions and
their godless arrogance. When they
came to the land of Greece, they
did not scruple
810 to plunder the images of the gods
and set fire to temples: altars have
vanished, and the abodes of deities
have been ruined, uprooted,
wrenched from their foundations.
Because of this evil they have
done, they are suffering evil to
match it in full measure, and have
still to suffer more: the fountain of
815 suffering has not stopped flowing –
more of it is still gushing forth, so
great will be the clotted libation of
slain men's blood on the soil of the
Plataeans, shed by the Dorian
spear.⁸³ The heaps of corpses will
voicelessly proclaim to the eyes of
men,
820 even to the third generation, that
one who is a mortal should not
think arrogant thoughts: outrage

has blossomed and has produced a crop of ruin, from which it is reaping a harvest of universal sorrow. Look on the price that is being paid for these actions, and remember Athens⁸⁴ and Greece: let no one

⁸²⁵despise the fortune he possesses and, through lust for more, let his great prosperity go to waste. Zeus, I tell you, stands over all as a chastiser of pride that boasts itself to excess, calling it to stern account. With this in mind, please advise

⁸³⁰him to show good sense; warn him, with well-spoken admonitions, to stop offending the gods with his boastful rashness. And you, dear, aged mother of Xerxes, go to your palace, take such attire as is fitting, and go to meet your son. Because

⁸³⁵of his grief at the disaster, all the threads of his richly decorated garments are torn and in rags around his body. Calm him with kindly words; I know that you are the only person he will be able to endure listening to. For myself, I am going away under the earth, down into the darkness. Farewell to

⁸⁴⁰you, old friends, and even amid these troubles, see you give your hearts pleasure day by day: wealth is of no benefit to the dead.

[*The GHOST disappears.*]

CHORUS: How it pains me to hear of these many sufferings, present and still to come, of the people of the East!

⁸⁴⁵ QUEEN: O god, how many dire sorrows are coming upon me! But the misfortune that stings me most

of all is to hear of the
dishonourable state of the
garments that clothe my son's
body. I am going now, and I will
take proper attire from the

⁸⁵⁰palace and try to meet my son. We
will not fail those who are dearest
to us when they are in trouble.
[Exit.]

CHORUS:

O *popoi*! What a great and good life
we enjoyed
in our well-run city, when our old
⁸⁵⁵never-failing, never-harming,
invincible king,
godlike Darius, ruled the country!

In the first place, we produced armies
of proven worth,
⁸⁶⁰and high- towered cities < we put
totally to sack >;
and, marching back from war, < our
men > came unscathed,
unfatigued, to flourishing homes.

⁸⁶⁵And how many cities he took, without
crossing the stream of the river
Halys⁸⁵
or stirring from his hearth!
⁸⁶⁹⁻⁷¹Such were the freshwater
dwellings of the Thracians⁸⁶
that neighbour the Strymonian gulf;

and, beyond the lake, the mainland
cities, each surrounded by a high
wall,
⁸⁷⁵obeyed this King,
as did those spread around the broad
strait of Helle, and the Propontis⁸⁷
with its deep bays,
and the mouth of the Black Sea;

⁸⁸⁰and the sea-girt islands that lay
near this land⁸⁸

by the promontory that runs into the
sea,⁸⁹
such as Lesbos, olive-growing Samos,
⁸⁸⁵and Chios; and Paros, Naxos,
Myconos
and Andros, the near neighbour that
adjoins Tenos;

⁸⁹⁰and he also ruled the sea-lands
midway between the two shores,⁹⁰
Lemnos and the habitations of Icaros,
and Rhodes and Cnidus, and the cities
of Cyprus,
⁸⁹⁵Paphos and Soli and Salamis⁹¹ –
whose mother-city is the cause of our
present lamentation;

^{898–900}and the wealthy, populous
< cities > of the Greeks
in the Ionian domain he ruled by his
wisdom.

He had available to him the tireless
strength of men-at-arms
and of a mixed multitude of allies.

⁹⁰⁵But now we are experiencing the
decisive reversal of all this by the
gods in war,
mightily smitten by blows struck at
sea.

*[Enter XERXES from the west. He is
alone, on foot, his royal robes in
rags, and carrying nothing but an
empty quiver.]*

XERXES:

Ió, ió!

^{905–10}Hapless that I am, to have met
this dreadful fate, so utterly
unpredictable!
How cruelly the god has trodden
on the Persian race! What am I to do,
wretched me?

The strength is drained out of my
limbs

when I see these aged citizens.⁹²
⁹¹⁵Would to Zeus that the fate of
death
had covered me over too
together with the men who are
departed!

CHORUS:

Ototoi, my King, for that fine army,
⁹²⁰and for the great honour of Persian
empire
and the men who adorned it,
whom now the god has scythed away!
[*They shift from chant to song.*]
The land laments its native youth
killed by Xerxes, who crammed Hades
⁹²⁴⁻⁵with Persians: many men
who were marched away, the flower
of the land,
slayers with the bow, thronging
myriads of men, have perished and
gone.
Aiai, aiai, for our brave defenders!
King of our country, the land of Asia
⁹³⁰is terribly, terribly down on her
knees!

XERXES:

Here am I – *oioi!* – one to grieve for:
wretch that I am, I see I have been a
bane
to my nation and my fatherland.

CHORUS:

⁹³⁵In response to your return
⁹³⁶⁻⁴⁰I shall send forth, send forth with
many tears,
the shout of woeful words, the cry of
woeful thoughts
of a Mariandynian dirge-singer.⁹³

XERXES:

⁹⁴⁴Utter words of grief and sorrow,
full of lamentation; for this divinity
has turned right round against me.

CHORUS:

I shall do so indeed, I tell you,
⁹⁴⁵honouring the sufferings of the
army and the grievous blows
struck at sea
to the city and the nation: truly I shall
cry forth
the tearful wail of a mourner.

XERXES:

⁹⁵⁰It was the Ionian, the Ionian war
spirit,
giving victory to their embattled
ships, that robbed us of our men,
cutting a swathe across the night-dark
expanse of the sea and the ill-
starred shore.

CHORUS:

⁹⁵⁵Cry 'Oioioi!' and learn it all.
Where are the rest, your multitude of
friends?
Where are those who stood beside
you,
men such as Pharandaces was,
Susas, Pelagon and Datamas,
⁹⁶⁰and Psammis and Susiscanes
who went from Agbatana?

XERXES:

I left them dead,
fallen out of a Tyrian ship off the
shores
⁹⁶⁵of Salamis, striking against a
rugged cape.

CHORUS:

Cry 'Oioioi!' Where did you leave
Pharnuchus,
yes, and the brave Ariomardus?
Where is the lord Seualces
⁹⁷⁰or the nobly born Lilaëus,
Memphis, Tharybis and Masistras,
Artembares and Hystaechmas?
I ask you this again!

XERXES:

Ió, ió, ah me!

⁹⁷⁵After setting eyes on ancient
Athens,
hateful Athens, all of them in one
stroke –
[repeated sobs] gasp their life out
wretchedly on the shore!

CHORUS:

And what of that flower of Persia,
your ever-faithful Eye,⁹⁴
⁹⁸⁰who counted the numberless tens
of thousands,⁹⁵
< >, the favourite son
of Batanochus,⁹⁶
the son of Seisames, the son of
Megabates,
and great Parthus and Oebares –
⁹⁸⁵did you leave them, did you leave
them? Oh, oh, hapless ones!
You speak of evils beyond evils for
noble Persians.

XERXES:

You do stir up in me
a longing for my brave comrades,
⁹⁹⁰speaking of unforgettable,
unforgettable things, hateful
beyond hatefulness.
My heart cries out, cries out, within
my body!

CHORUS:

And there are others too whom we
miss,
Xanthes, the commander of ten
thousand Mardians,⁹⁷
and Anchaes of the Arians,⁹⁸
⁹⁹⁵and Diaïxis and Arsaces,
lords of the cavalry,
and Egdadates and Lythimnas
and Tolmus, never surfeited with
battle.
¹⁰⁰⁰I am amazed, amazed, that they
are not following
behind your wheeled tent.⁹⁹

XERXES:

Yes, those who were marshals of my
army have gone.

CHORUS:

They have gone – *oi!* – without a
name.

XERXES:

Ieh, ieh! Ió, ió!

CHORUS:

¹⁰⁰⁵*Ió, ió*, you gods,
you have caused suffering that no one
expected
for all to behold! What an evil eye
Ruin has cast upon us!

XERXES:

Oi, we have been struck down from
our age-old good fortune –

CHORUS:

We have been struck down, that is all
too plain –

XERXES:

¹⁰¹⁰– by new agony, new agony!

CHORUS:

– by an ill-starred encounter
with Ionian sailors.
The Persian race is luckless in war.

XERXES:

^{1014–15}Indeed it is: I am stricken to misery
in the loss of this great army.

CHORUS:

You who have brought such great ruin
to Persia – what is *not* lost?

XERXES:

Do you see these remnants of my
attire?

CHORUS:

I do, I do!

XERXES:

¹⁰²⁰*[displaying his quiver]* And this
arrow-holding –

CHORUS:

What is this that you say was saved?

XERXES:

– repository for missiles?

CHORUS:

Little indeed, out of so much.

XERXES:

Our defenders have been decimated.

CHORUS:

¹⁰²⁵The Ionian people are not
cowardly in battle.

XERXES:

They are all too martial! I have
witnessed
a disaster I never expected.

CHORUS:

You mean the rout of our mass of
ships?

XERXES:

¹⁰³⁰I ripped my robe at the terrible
event.

CHORUS:

Papai, papai!

XERXES:

No, ‘*papai*’ is too mild!

CHORUS:

Yes, the disaster was twice and thrice
as great.

XERXES:

Painful, and a delight to our enemies!

CHORUS:

¹⁰³⁵Cut short, too, was the strength –

XERXES:

I am denuded of escorts!

CHORUS:

– of our friends, by calamities at sea.

XERXES:

Wet, wet your cheeks in grief, and go
with me to the palace.

CHORUS:

I wet my cheeks in mourning.

XERXES:

¹⁰⁴⁰Cry out now in response to my

cries.

CHORUS:

A sad answer of sad sound to sad
sound.

XERXES:

Raise a song of woe, joining it
together with mine.

XERXES: and CHORUS:

Ototototoi!

CHORUS:

How grievous is this disaster!

¹⁰⁴⁵*Oi*, it truly does give me pain!

*[Through the next three stanzas the
CHORUS successively perform the
actions that XERXES prescribes.]*

XERXES:

Row, row with your arms, and groan
for my sake.

CHORUS:

Aiai, aiai! Sorrow, sorrow!

XERXES:

Cry out now in response to my cries.

CHORUS:

I can take care to do that, master.

XERXES:

¹⁰⁵⁰Now raise a high-pitched wail.

XERXES: and CHORUS:

Ototototoi!

CHORUS:

And mixed in with my groans will be

—

oi! – black, violent blows.¹⁰⁰

XERXES:

Beat your breasts too, and accompany
the action with a Mysian cry.

CHORUS:

¹⁰⁵⁵Painful, painful!

XERXES:

Now, please, ravage the white hairs of
your beard.

CHORUS:

With clenched hands, with clenched
hands, very mournfully!

XERXES:

And raise a piercing shriek.

CHORUS:

I shall do that too.

XERXES:

¹⁰⁶⁰Tear the folds of your robe with
your hands.

CHORUS:

Painful, painful!

XERXES:

And pluck your hair, and voice your
pity for the army.

CHORUS:

With clenched hands, with clenched
hands, very mournfully!

XERXES:

And make your eyes moist.

CHORUS:

¹⁰⁶⁵I assure you I am moistening them.
*[A mournful procession now sets
itself slowly in motion, as the CHORUS
escort XERXES away towards his
palace.]*

XERXES:

Cry out now in response to my cries.

CHORUS:

Oioi, oioi!

XERXES:

Go wailing to the palace.

CHORUS:

Ió, ió!

XERXES:

¹⁰⁷⁰Let 'iό' indeed be heard throughout
the city –

CHORUS:

Let 'iό' be heard indeed, yes, yes!

XERXES:

– as you lament while you walk
delicately.

CHORUS:

Ió, ió, Persian ground is hard to tread
on!¹⁰¹

XERXES:

< >

CHORUS:

< >.

XERXES:

Ehhh-ehhh, ehhh-ehhh – the triple-
oared –

CHORUS:

¹⁰⁷⁵*Ehhh-ehhh, ehhh-ehhh* – boats
destroyed them!

XERXES:

< Escort me now to my palace. >

CHORUS:

Yes, I will escort you, with loud wails
of grief.
[*Exeunt.*]

The Persian War Tetralogy¹

1. PHINEUS

Phineus, the blind prophet of Thrace, was persecuted by the Harpies, who persistently snatched his food from the table or even from his mouth (fr. 258), until they were driven away, and in some accounts killed, by Zetes and Calais, sons of the North Wind (Boreas) and of the Athenian princess Oreithyia, when Phineus' land was visited by the Argonauts; the fullest presentation of the story is by Apollonius of Rhodes, Argonautica 2.176–499. From a passage of Philodemus' treatise On Piety, it appears that Aeschylus' version of the story was one of those that ended with the death of the Harpies; there is little more that we can say about its content.

258 And there have been many meals that proved not to be meals,
which they pillaged from my [or his] ravenous jaws just when my [or
his] mouth was taking its first delight in them.

*A description of the Harpies' depredations, probably but not certainly by
Phineus himself.*

258a There is no lack of wailing over my [or his] getting no food.
Perhaps from the same speech.

259 They have ankle-supports² inside their well-fitting shoes.
Probably from a description of the swift-footed sons of Boreas.

2. THE PERSIANS

3. GLAUCUS OF POTNIAE

Glaucus of Potniae (a town just south of Thebes) was famous for having been devoured by his own mares during the chariot race at the funeral games for Pelias (the uncle of Jason) at Iolcus. Our sources give various explanations of how this came to happen, which are not necessarily incompatible. The fourth-century scholar Asclepiades, in his *Tales Told in Tragedy*, says that Glaucus had reared the mares on human flesh, to make them fiercer in war, and that they turned on him when they ran short of this food; Asclepiades' source was almost certainly Aeschylus' drama, since no other major tragic dramatist made this story the subject of a play.

Virgil, however (*Georgics* 3.266–8), in a passage on the power of sexual desire in horses and other animals, ascribes the madness of Glaucus' mares to the influence of Venus/Aphrodite, and his commentator Servius says this was because he had neglected her worship and/or because, in order to increase the mares' speed, he had not allowed them to mate. In the fragments of the play, we can probably detect Glaucus departing for the games (cf. fr. 36.5–6), perhaps after an attempt to dissuade him (fr. 37 may be his reply to this); the catastrophe will have been narrated in a messenger-speech (frr. 38 and 39, and parts of fr. 36b), apparently to Glaucus' wife. If fr. 25a is rightly assigned to this play, the god Poseidon (whose sphere of interest included everything to do with horses) appeared in the play – perhaps near the end, to explain why Glaucus had suffered as he did – and during his speech referred to a recent visit he had made to Himera in Sicily, perhaps in order to prophesy the great victory gained there in 480 BC over the Carthaginians by Gelon of Syracuse (see p. 6).

Aeschylus wrote another play about an entirely different mythical character also called Glaucus, and ancient scholars distinguished the two as Glaukos Potnieus (Glaucus of Potniae) and Glaukos Pontios (Glaucus the Sea God). Owing to the similarity of these titles, several fragments are assigned by one source or manuscript to one of the two plays, by another to the other; several more are simply quoted from Glaucus without it being specified which play is meant. It is usually, though not always, possible to assign such fragments to one or the other play on the basis of their content. I have included here all the substantial fragments (and one that is less substantial) that seem likely to belong to Glaucus of Potniae.

Several fragments of the same papyrus copy (frr. 36 and 36a–b) have been discovered at Oxyrhynchus in separate Italian and British excavations; the Italian fragments (PSI 1210) are known to be from Glaucus of Potniae because they contain part of a phrase quoted from the play by an ancient commentator on Aristophanes, the British fragments (Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 2160) because they contain the name of Glaucus and several words connected with chariot-racing. Only those papyrus fragments which may give us some significant information about the play are presented or mentioned below.

GLAUCUS(?):

...] having taken [the prize of victo]ry with my horses...
[...]

CHORUS(?):

[S]o may it be; and we pray (?) that you may [...] because of your
excellence (?) first in... [... get a good] omen on [this] journey.
[Singing.]

5-6 First of all we pour from our lips,
all together, our wishes for a good journey³...

36b This 'fragment' actually consists of several separate sections of the papyrus. **Section 1** possibly narrates a dream (of Glaucus' wife?) about a chariot race; phrases that can be understood are 'for he seemed' (line 1), 'wearing a garl[and]' (line 2) and 'horses' or 'horseman' (line 3). The first column of **section 2** contains mostly short lines, doubtless sung or chanted by the Chorus and perhaps commenting on the dream (line 10 contained the word *visions*) and hoping it would prove to bode well rather than ill (would turn out 'as is desired', line 11); in its second column we seem to be well into the 'messenger-speech' describing the fatal race ('with their teeth', line 2; 'drag', line 4; 'to strike', line 8; 'Glaucus', line 10; 'at the turning-post(s)', line 11; 'and the last [lap]', line 12; 'to gain [the glory(?)] of victory', line 13; 'of the man', line 14). It seems as though, as in the fictitious chariot race at Delphi described in Sophocles' *Electra* (680-763), the race went well for the central figure until nearly the end: but in **section 3** the disaster seems to be happening ('with their teeth', line 3; 'the bit', line 4; 'carries', line 5; 'striking', line 6; 'look(s) at', line 7; 'of the contest', line 8; 'to heal', line 9; 'to the sacrificer', line 11 – the sacrifice was apparently offered 'to [the] protecting gods, a[s] is cus[tomary]' (line 12)). Perhaps the chariot was first overturned (together with, or after, a number of others? Compare fr. 38 and Sophocles, *Electra* 724-30), and only then did the mares attack their driver; **section 4** contains likely traces of this in 'to ta[ke] in their [j]aws' (line 3) and 'charioteer' (line 4). **Section 7**, though two or three lines are more than half complete, is enigmatic:

But no [...] on dry land... [...]
But in the sea [...] is fearsome [...]
What a thing [is] this [that has appeared (?)]...]
like an indigenous (?) mountain [lion (??)]

5 For whence [...]?

For it is natural (?) that [...] should beget [...]
And for myself... [...]

Little can be gathered from the remaining sections, except that **section 8** appears to contain a hymn to Hermes, the ‘messenger of Zeus’ (line 17), and the only intelligible words in **section 9** are ‘(of) the salt waters of the sea’, possibly said in connection with the arrival of Poseidon.

37 For a contest does not wait for men who arrive late
Probably Glaucus, rejecting an attempt (by his wife?) to dissuade him from going to the games.

38

MESSENGER:

For chariot on chariot, corpse upon corpse, horses on horses, were piled in confusion.

39

MESSENGER:

They dragged him up in the manner of wolves, the way a pair of wolves carry off a fawn by the shoulders.

40a the harbour of Xiphirus (?)

According to the ancient lexicographer who records that Aeschylus in Glaucus of Potniae referred to this harbour, it was near Rhegium at the toe of Italy; it may therefore have been mentioned by Poseidon in his ‘Himera’ speech. Also from this speech may be another fragment (fr. 402), cited by Strabo (Geography 6.1.6) from an unspecified play of Aeschylus; Strabo says that, according to Aeschylus, Sicily was once part of the Italian mainland until it was broken off as the result of an earthquake (Poseidon was the god of earthquakes), ‘whence it is called Rhegium’ (as if from *rhēgnunai* ‘to break’).

25a Having thoroughly washed myself in its fair streams,⁴ I came to Himera on its high cliffs.

Poseidon speaking about a visit he has made to Sicily?

4. PROMETHEUS THE FIRE-BEARER

Apart from the surviving *Prometheus Bound*, the considerable information we possess about *Prometheus Unbound* (see pp. 199–203), and a scattering of quotations ascribed to an unspecified *Prometheus* play, we

have four further packages of evidence about Prometheus plays attributed to Aeschylus. (1) The medieval catalogue of his plays lists a Prometheus Pyrphoros (Prometheus the Fire-Bearer), and we have one quotation attributed to it (fr. 208) and one statement reported from it (fr. 208a). (2) The lexicologist Pollux (9.156) states that there was an Aeschylean play called Prometheus Pyrkaeus (Prometheus the Fire-Kindler), and elsewhere (10.64) he quotes a line from this play (fr. 205); a metrical licence in this line proves that the play must have been a satyr drama, not a tragedy. (3) The ancient headnote ('Hypothesis') to The Persians states that in the production of which it formed part, in 472 BC, the fourth play (i.e. the satyr drama) was Prometheus. (4) There are several papyrus fragments (frr. 204a–d; only 204b and 204d have enough intelligible material to justify inclusion in this volume), two quotations (frr. 206 and 207), one other reference (fr. 207a, from the ancient commentary to Hesiod, Works and Days 89), and several vase paintings that connect satyrs with Prometheus and/or with fire.

From this evidence it is clear that there was an Aeschylean satyr play, presumably the one produced in 472, in which Prometheus brought fire to the satyrs, who had never seen it before and were greatly delighted by it (particularly because they hoped its possession would make them more attractive to nymphs: fr. 204b) but who had no idea how to handle it safely (frr. 206 and 207). In exchange for fire, it would seem, they gave Prometheus a gift that he, and the human race, could have done without (see fr. 207a).

It has usually been supposed, on the basis of (2), that Prometheus the Fire-Kindler was the satyr drama, while Prometheus the Fire-Bearer was a serious play forming a trilogy with Prometheus Bound and Unbound. There are, however, two serious objections to this view. On the one hand, there is no possible place for Prometheus the Fire-Bearer in a tragic Prometheus trilogy. It cannot have come first, because the exposition of the initial situation in Prometheus Bound (especially in lines 199–241) is so full and detailed as to preclude the possibility that the audience are being told all this for the second time. It cannot have come second, because Hermes' prophecy in Prometheus Bound 1014–29 allows for no other events to intervene between Prometheus' return to the daylight and the beginning of his torment by the eagle. And it cannot have come third, because Prometheus Unbound is known to have wound up the story of Prometheus so completely that there can have been no scope for a further play about him. On the other hand, since epithets were attached to play titles precisely for the purpose of distinguishing between plays of the same name by the same author, it is very unlikely that two different Prometheus plays should be given epithets so similar, in meaning as well as in form, as 'Pyrphoros' and 'Pyrkaeus'. More probably, one of these epithets is a corruption of the other, and all the evidence summarized under (1–4)

above relates to the same play, the satyr play of 472. Andrew Brown (Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies 37 (1990), pp. 50–56) has argued convincingly that the proper title of this play is Prometheus Pyrphoros, and that the epithet ‘Pyrkaeus’, known only to Pollux, is an error caused by the existence of a Sophoclean play entitled Nauplios Pyrkaeus (Nauplius the Fire-Raiser). Nauplius, to avenge the murder of his son Palamedes, lured the Greek ships returning from Troy on to the rocks of Euboea by lighting a fire which they mistook for a harbour beacon; Prometheus, by contrast, never lights a fire – he finds it already burning, steals it and brings it to men or satyrs as the case may be. I have accordingly presented all the fragments attributable to the satyr drama under the title Prometheus the Fire-Bearer, in addition to those actually ascribed to a play so named.

204b

CHORUS OF SATYRS: And friendly [Ny]sian (?) delight⁵ will set me dancing:

<I will wear (?)> a g[l]eami[n]g
tunic by the unwearying brilliance of
the fire.

And one of the Naiads,⁶ when she
hears about it from me,

⁵will chase me hard by the light
that shines at my hearth!

And I am confident, I tell you, that the
nymphs

will join in choral dances

because they honour the gift of
Prometheus.

⁹⁻¹⁰And [I have good hope (?)] that
they will chant

a fine song about its giver, saying this

—

that Prometheus is to humans
a bringer of life [and] eager to provide
gifts.

My hope is that they will dance [...
...] of winter chill [...]

¹⁵And I am confident, I tell you, that
the nymphs
will join in choral dances
because they honour the gift of
Prometheus.

There follow remains of nine further

lines including 'that it is proper for
shepherds (?)' (line 18), 'wandering
by night' (lines 19–20), 'thickly
wooded' (line 24).

204d A lyric refrain (lines 2–4) containing 'and, I tell you'
(line 2; cf. fr. 204b.6), 'near the fire' (line 3) and 'drunk (?)' (line 4);
then a new stanza containing 'snow like the best horses'⁷ (line 6) and
'my (?) head from' (or 'in?') a shower' (line 7). The satyrs are evidently
continuing to exult in the benefits of having a fire in their home in winter
(cf. fr. 204b.13–14).

205 Linen plugs and long strips of raw flax
Possibly a recommendation (by Prometheus?) for how to treat a burn.

206 Take care the round drop⁸ doesn't touch your mouth; it's bitter
and very dangerous to the throat (?)
*Presumably Prometheus warning Silenus (?), who has never before seen
a pot boiling over a fire. Silenus, father of the satyrs, featured as a
character in every satyr drama.*

207

PROMETHEUS:

Then you'll be mourning for your beard, like a billygoat!
*To a satyr (or Silenus?) who, on first seeing fire, is eager to kiss and
embrace it.*

207a He⁹ says that Prometheus received the jar of evils from the
satyrs and deposited it with Epimetheus,¹⁰ instructing him not to
accept any gift from Zeus, but he disregarded the warning and
accepted Pandora.

207b A mortal woman created by the fashioning of clay.
Referring to Pandora (so the ancient commentator who cites the line).

208 Staying silent when appropriate and saying what suits the
occasion.¹¹

208a For in the *Fire-Bearer* he [Aeschylus] says that he [Prometheus]
was bound for thirty thousand years.¹²

SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

Preface to *Seven Against Thebes*

*Seven Against Thebes*¹ was produced at the City Dionysia of 467 BC as the third part of a four-play production – that is, the last play in a tragic trilogy; it was preceded by *Laius* and *Oedipus*, and followed by the satyr drama *The Sphinx*. The production won first prize. Both the rival dramatists on this occasion were sons of famous tragic poets of the previous generation: Aristias son of Pratinas, and Polyphrasmon son of Phrynichus. Sophocles, who had been victorious the previous year, was not competing.

The story of Laius, Oedipus and the wars for possession of Thebes among members of the latter's family after his death had long been familiar throughout the Greek world, and was the subject of three early epics, the *Oedipodeia*, the *Thebaid* (about the curse of Oedipus, the quarrel between his sons, and the expedition of the Seven) and the *Epigoni* (about the attack on, and destruction of, Thebes by the sons of the Seven). Sophocles' treatment of it in *Antigone*, *Oedipus the King* and *Oedipus at Colonus* (to name his three plays in the order of their composition) became canonical for later times, but we are not entitled to take it for granted that the stories were used by, or even necessarily known to, Aeschylus in the form in which Sophocles presented them, except where there is positive evidence that this was so. The evidence that we do possess about the content of *Laius*, *Oedipus* and *The Sphinx* – much of which is derived from *Seven Against Thebes* itself – is discussed later in this volume (see pp. 102–6); briefly, the main event of *Laius* will have been the death of Laius at the hands (as all will have assumed) of an unknown assailant (in fact, of course, it was his son Oedipus, subsequently to come to Thebes, defeat the Sphinx, be given the vacant throne and marry Laius' widow), while *Oedipus* will have included what Sophocles (*Antigone* 51) called Oedipus' 'self-detection' of his crimes, followed by his self-blinding (cf. *Seven* 778–84).

The climax of *Oedipus* is likely to have been the curse of Oedipus on

his sons, which seems to have run roughly thus: 'You will quarrel, and come to a bitter resolution, dividing my inheritance sword in hand' (cf. *Seven* 766–7, 785–90). Little if anything of the following phases of the story can have been included in the action of *Oedipus*, and it appears that the audience were left to infer them from backward references in *Seven Against Thebes* and from their prior knowledge of the myth. It is not difficult for us to do likewise.

After the death of Oedipus, his sons Eteocles and Polyneices quarrelled over their father's property and over the kingship of Thebes. The virtuous prophet Amphiaraus thinks that Polyneices had a considerable degree of right on his side (*Seven* 584), and there is reason to believe that Aeschylus represented him as the elder of the two brothers;² but by whatever means, Eteocles was able to gain full control of the city, and Polyneices went into exile. Coming to Argos, he met another exile, Tydeus; the two won the favour of King Adrastus and the hands of his two daughters, and Adrastus, strongly encouraged by Tydeus (cf. *Seven* 571–5), decided to mount an expedition against Thebes, with seven great warriors (among them Polyneices, Tydeus and Amphiaraus) as its leading figures. Polyneices' objective was of course to gain for himself the Theban throne, the property of Oedipus and revenge on his brother, but with the exception of Amphiaraus, a most reluctant participant in the expedition,³ all his colleagues seem to be set on the destruction of the city.⁴

When the surviving play begins, Thebes has been under siege for some time, and the prophet Teiresias⁵ has declared that the day now commencing will see a major enemy assault on the city. The audience, knowing the story well and knowing that this is the final play of the tragic trilogy, will be certain that this will be the day when Eteocles and Polyneices kill each other. Eteocles too can guess that the time has come for the 'bitter resolution' of which his father's curse had spoken, but not what form this will take (cf. 70–72); if the words of the curse were approximately as suggested above, he has no reason to suppose that he will fight his brother one-to-one. Indeed it is likely that at this stage he has no intention of personally taking part in the battle at all, and that (unlike the citizenry whom he harangues in the opening scene) he is not in armour.⁶ He is the helmsman of the city (2–3, 62), whereas the champions at the gates are described as oarsmen (283, 595) – and one man cannot do both these jobs.

What changes Eteocles' mind is the panic of the young women (who form the Chorus), which brings him back in a hurry (at 182) from his task of organizing the defences (cf. 62–5). He calms them down (with difficulty, and not very effectively – as their songs, full of fear and alarm, make evident throughout the next phase of the play) and, apparently to reassure them further, undertakes (282–4) that he will post seven champions *including himself* to guard the city's seven gates: there had been no previous mention of any such plan. We begin to see where this is leading. It is likely that Polyneices and Tydeus, as Adrastus' sons-in-law, were always assumed to have been prominent figures in the attacking army, and most lists of the Seven include both of them; so we expect Polyneices to be attacking one of the gates, and expect too that Eteocles will post himself to defend that same gate. But will he do so by design or in ignorance?

To that question, it will prove, the best answer is 'both', as eventually emerges from the extraordinary scene (375–676) commonly known as 'the shield scene' or 'the seven *Redepaare* [pairs of speeches]'. Eteocles, having gone off apparently to make his postings, has returned to hear the Scout report who is attacking each gate. Six times, working sequentially round the walls in a clockwise direction, the Scout names the man attacking a gate – every one of them, except for Amphiaraus, a physical monstrosity, or a moral one, or both – describes the device on his shield (again always boastful and arrogant, except for Amphiaraus, who has none at all) and asks who can oppose him; six times Eteocles names a man who will defend the gate, and is always able to find something about the attacker, or the defender, or both, which can be taken as a good omen for a successful defence. It has long been disputed whether Eteocles is actually making the postings during this scene, or whether he has made some or all of them already (during his absence between 286 and 369); but the non-random sequence of the verbal tenses referring to the postings strongly points to the conclusion, with which nothing in the text is inconsistent, that he has made three, probably four, of the seven postings already, and that only those at the sixth, seventh and first gates, which are fairly close together (cf. 570–89), remain to be made.⁷ The audience, of course, cannot know this at the outset, and will have no idea how fateful is Eteocles' decision not to take on himself the defence of the first gate against Tydeus.⁸

After that, four times in succession, the defender turns out to have been posted already, and by now most spectators will have guessed that Polyneices will be attacking the last gate. Eteocles thus now has

only one chance to avoid disaster, and that proves to be no chance at all, for the sixth attacker is Amphiaraus, and Eteocles knows that according to an oracle Amphiaraus will be swallowed by the earth before he can attack the city (615–19; cf. 587–8) and therefore that the task of opposing him is a purely nominal one to which he cannot honourably assign himself. And then we hear what we were expecting, and Eteocles hears what he never expected: the seventh attacker, assigned by lot (55) to the seventh gate, is Polyneices, and this is the gate which Eteocles has reserved himself to defend. The curse of Oedipus has come true in the worst possible way.

Or has it? The Scout, in his last words before his final exit (650–52), takes it for granted that Eteocles will send someone else to fight Polyneices and reminds him, and us, that his proper role is to be ‘captain’ of the city; and the Chorus (677–82) cannot understand why he does not nominate a substitute and insist that this would not be dishonourable (698–9). But to Eteocles’ mind it is futile to resist the storm-force winds and currents of divine hostility (689–91; cf. 705–9). And there is also another factor, which finds ghastly expression in the epigram (four Greek words) which he puts in the mouth of the Curse (697): ‘The gain comes before the death that comes after’. To Eteocles it is a gain, a benefit, to have the opportunity of personally killing his brother, even at the cost of his own life; he *wants* to fight him and thinks it *right* to do so (673). Whether this is the Curse taking possession of his mind, or whether it is the bursting out of a deep hatred long suppressed, we cannot tell; perhaps we are meant to suppose it is both.

At any rate it is effectively the end of the trilogy. Eteocles, fully armed, leaves the scene for the last time; the Chorus reflect (720–91) on the disastrous history of the royal house; a messenger reports that the city is saved, but the two princes are dead; presently the two bodies are brought back, mourned over (with virtually no distinction being made between the brother who fought to defend the city and the one who fought alongside those who aimed to destroy it) and finally taken off for burial. The disturbance that began when Laius defied an oracular warning to beget no heir (742–51) has reached its end in the annihilation of his heirs.

Towards the end of *Seven* there are several passages of highly suspect authenticity. The final scene, in which a Herald forbids the burial of Polyneices, Antigone defies him, and the Chorus divide in two, half

escorting the body of one brother and half that of the other, ruins an ending which till then had stressed, over and over again, the equality of the brothers in death, and leaves the action of the play, and therefore of the trilogy, lacking any closure; at one point, moreover (1039 and note), the text can hardly be understood without prior acquaintance with Sophocles' *Antigone*. It is overwhelmingly probable, therefore, that this scene was added for a restaging of *Seven*, at a time when Sophocles' play had made it impossible to think of the mutual slaughter of Eteocles and Polyneices without also thinking of the tragic heroism of their sister.

If that is the case, it becomes unlikely that Antigone and her sister Ismene (862) originally figured at all in a play whose later scenes otherwise emphasize the complete destruction of the house of Laius,⁹ and this is confirmed by the very clumsy way in which they are introduced in 861–74, with the Chorus saying that the sisters have evidently come to sing a lament and immediately adding, without any reason given, that they themselves, the Chorus, ought to sing one first. Clearly the interpolator wanted to have the sisters sing the antiphonal lament 961–1004 (which Aeschylus doubtless wrote for sections, or section leaders, of the Chorus¹⁰) but did not want to bring them on immediately before it and so break up the continuous sequence of lyric lament. The removal of 861–74 allows the Chorus' lament over the bodies of the two brothers to begin immediately they have been brought on stage (a movement covered by 848–60).

The short anapaestic passage 822–31 may well also be an interpolation; it contributes nothing to the reshaping of the ending consequent on the introduction into the play of Antigone and Ismene, and need not (though it may) have been composed at the same time as the other additions.

As a result of these changes to the ending of *Seven*, we seem to have lost a few lines from the very conclusion of the play – though probably no more than that: already in the last surviving genuine lines the question has been raised (1002) of where the brothers shall be buried, and it has been pointed out (1004) that it would be cruel to lay them near the father who had cursed them; once an alternative suggestion has been made and accepted, the Chorus – all of it, not two halves separately as in the altered ending – can escort the two corpses to their final home, the only share of their father's possessions that has in the end been allotted to them (731–3).

NOTES

1. This title, though already current in the late fifth century (Aristophanes, *Frogs* 1021), is unlikely to have been given to the play by Aeschylus, since nowhere in it are Thebes or the Thebans referred to under those names; they are always called the city and people of Cadmus. Probably the component parts of closely connected trilogies like this one originally had no separate titles of their own.
2. An Etruscan hand-mirror of the fourth century shows two warriors labelled *Eutucle* and *Phulnice* about to stab each other in the left breast (cf. *Seven* 888–90); Polyneices has a beard, Eteocles does not. In *Seven* too Polyneices is said to be bearded (666), and though we are not told in the text that Eteocles is beardless, it is significant that a Chorus of very young women can address him as ‘child’ (686) and that he, unlike Polyneices, is unmarried (clearly implied by 187–8).
3. See note on *Seven* 612.
4. Cf. *Seven* 42–8 (the oath of the Seven – we cannot at that stage be sure that Polyneices is among them), 427 and 434 (Capaneus), 467 (Eteocles), 531 (Parthenopaeus). The uncomfortable position of Polyneices, attacking his own city in such company, may have reminded many spectators of that of the ex-tyrant Hippias and his family accompanying the Persian expeditions against Athens in 490 and 480 respectively (Herodotus 6.102, 107, 109.3; 8.52.2).
5. See note on *Seven* 24. It is, of course, possible that Teiresias had been seen on stage in one or both of the preceding plays.
6. I have argued this more fully in *Aeschylean Tragedy* (Bari 1996), pp. 107–9.
7. See further *Aeschylean Tragedy*, pp. 103–7.
8. As H. D. F. Kitto pointed out (*Greek Tragedy*, third edn (London 1961), pp. 48–9), for more than ten lines (397–407a) – over half of Eteocles’ speech – Aeschylus makes it seem as though he is going to post himself at this gate!
9. Cf. 691, 720, 813, 877, 881–2, 951–5.
10. Except for 996–7 (see note on 995); these two lines, which suit only the sisters, were probably inserted by the interpolator.

Characters

ETEOCLES, *ruler of Thebes*

SCOUT CHORUS *of Theban maidens*

MESSENGER

[ANTIGONE *and* ISMENE, *daughters of Oedipus* HERALD¹]

[Scene: The citadel of Thebes. A mound represents a shrine to the major gods of the city. One side-passage is imagined as leading to the lower town, the other to the walls and the battlefield. A crowd of armed Theban citizens is present. ETEOCLES (not in armour) enters, attended, from the town, to address them.]

ETEOCLES: Citizens of Cadmus' land,
he who guards the city's fortunes,
controlling the helm at its stern,²
never letting his eyes rest in sleep,
has to give the right advice for the
situation. For if we should be
successful, the responsibility would
be

⁵god's; but if on the other hand
disaster were to strike (which may
it not!) then Eteocles' name alone
would be repeatedly harped on by
the citizens throughout the town
amid a noisy surge of terrified
wailing – from which may Zeus the
¹⁰Defender, true to his title, defend
the city of the Cadmeans! This is
the time when every one of you –
including both those who have not
yet reached the peak of young
manhood and those whom time
has carried past it, and who are
feeding abundant bodily growth –
must have a care for your city, as
^{14–15}as is right and proper, must come

to its aid, to the aid of the altars of its native gods so as never to let their rites be obliterated, to the aid of your children and to the aid of your Motherland, your most loving nurse; for when you were children crawling on her kindly soil, she generously accepted all the toil of your upbringing, and nurtured you to become

²⁰her shield-bearing inhabitants and be faithful to her in this hour of need. And thus far, up to this day, god has inclined to the right side: we have been besieged within our walls all this time, but for the most part, thanks to the gods, the war is turning out well for us. But now, as the prophet³ states –

^{25–6}that shepherd of fowl,⁴ who with infallible skill observes birds of augury with his ears and his mind, without using fire⁵ – this man, the master of this kind of prophecy, says that a great plan for an attack by the Achaeans⁶ upon the city is
^{30–31}being discussed this night. So get moving, all of you, to the battlements and gates of the walls – hurry, with your full armour! Man the parapets, take your stand on the platforms of the walls, stand firm at the gate entrances, have good

^{34–5}confidence, and don't be too afraid of this horde of foreigners. God will bring success!

[Exeunt citizens, making for the walls.]

I have also acted, sending scouts to spy on the army, and I am sure they are not wasting time on their way. When I have heard from them, I will certainly not be caught

by deception.

[Enter SCOUT from the direction of
the battlefield.]

40 SCOUT: Eteocles, most excellent king
of the Cadmeans, I come bringing
definite news from the army out
there; I was myself an eyewitness
to what they were doing. Seven
men, bold leaders of companies,
slaughtered a bull, let its blood run

45-6 into a black-rimmed shield, and,
touching the bull's blood with their
hands, swore an oath by Ares,
Enyo⁷ and blood- loving Terror
that they would either bring
destruction on the city, sacking the
town of the Cadmeans by force, or
perish

49-51 and mix their blood into the soil of
this land; and with their own
hands, shedding tears, they were
adorning the chariot of Adrastus⁸
with mementos of themselves⁹ to
take home to their parents. But no
word of pity passed their lips:
there breathed within them a steel-
hearted spirit, blazing with
courage, like that of lions with the
light of war in their eyes. You have
not been delayed in learning this
by any slowness

55 of mine: I left them drawing lots,
so that according to the fall of the
lot each should lead his company
against a gate. In view of this, you
should speedily post men of
excellence, the pick of the city, at
the entrances of the gates; for the
Argive 60 army, fully equipped, is
already coming close, raising the
dust, and white foam from the
horses' lungs is dripping and
staining the soil. Be like a good

ship's captain and make the city tight, before the squalls of war assail her – for this army is like a roaring land-wave – and take the very quickest

⁶⁵opportunity of doing this. For my part, from now on, I will keep a faithful daytime scout's eye out,¹⁰ and through my clear reports you will know what is happening outside and not come to harm.

[Exit SCOUT by the way he came.]

70 ETEOCLES: O Zeus, and Earth, and you gods of the city, O mighty Curse and Fury of my father,¹¹ do not let my city be captured by its foes, do not extirpate it from Greece, root

⁷⁴⁻⁵and branch, in utter destruction! Never bind this free land and this free city of Cadmus with the yoke-strap of slavery! Be its defence! I believe I am speaking in our common interest; for when a city enjoys success, it honours its gods.

[Exit ETEOCLES towards the walls.

The CHORUS of Theban maidens enter, from the town, in terror and confusion.]

CHORUS:

< Ah, ah, > I cry for great, fearful sufferings!

The army has been let loose, it has left its camp!

~~This~~This great host of horse is pouring forward at the gallop!

The dust I see in the air shows me it is so,

a voiceless messenger but true and certain!

The soil < of my land > ,

struck by hooves, sends the noise right to my ear!

It's flying, it's roaring like an

irresistible
mountain torrent!
Oh, oh, you gods and you goddesses,
keep off
the surge of evil!
The noise < of a war cry comes > over
the walls:
the⁹⁰ army with their white shields rise
plain to see, coming swift < -footed >
against the city!¹²
Who, who of the gods or goddesses
will protect us, who will ward them
off?
Should I, then, fall down before
the < ancestral > images of our gods?
O blest ones, in your fair abode!
Now is the moment to clasp the
images: why do we wait
and moan to no purpose?
Do⁹⁰ you hear, or do you not, the clatter
of shields?
When, when, if not now, shall we be
able < to adorn
the gods > with robes and garlands as
prayer-offerings?
I see the noise¹³ – it is the clatter of
many spears!
¹⁰⁴¹⁵What do you mean to do, Ares,
ancient god
of this land?¹⁴ Betray your own
country?
God of the golden helmet, watch over,
watch over the city
which you once held worthy of your
love!

[*They approach the shrine, prostrate
themselves and embrace the images.*]
Gods who dwell in this city and land,
come hither, all of you,
¹⁰⁵²⁰Behold this company
of maidens supplicating you to save
them from slavery.
A wave of men, their crests at an
angle,¹⁵ breaks loudly

over the city, raised up by the blasts
of war.

Father Zeus, you who have supreme
power over all,
at all costs defend us from capture by
our foes!

¹¹³⁰ The Argives are surrounding the city
of Cadmus, and terror of their warlike
arms

throws us into confusion; the bits in
the horses' cheeks
give forth a piercing whine that tells
of slaughter;

¹¹³⁵ and out of the army seven
distinguished leaders of men,
assigned by lot, are taking their stand
against the seven gates,
fully armed, brandishing their spears.

O powerful daughter of Zeus, lover of
battle,

¹¹⁴⁰ be the protector of our city,
Pallas! And the lord of horses and
ruler of the sea,¹⁶

with < the mighty strength of > his
fish-spearing weapon –
¹¹⁴⁵ give release, give release from our
terror!

And you, Ares – ah, ah! – guard the
city

that bears Cadmus' name, and make
manifest your care for it!

¹¹⁵⁰ And Cypris,¹⁷ you who are the
ancestress of our race,
keep them away from us! For we are
born

¹¹⁵⁵ of your blood, and we approach you
with cries
and prayers that deserve a divine
hearing.

And you, Wolf-god,¹⁸ make yourself a
wolf

to the enemy army; and you, maiden
born of Leto,¹⁹ make ready your bow.

¹⁵⁰ [*They utter sharp cries of terror.*]

I hear the rattle of chariots round the
city!

O Lady Hera!

The sockets of their heavy-laden axles
are squealing!

Beloved Artemis!

¹⁵⁵ The air is going mad with the
brandishing of spears!

What is happening to our city? What
will become of it?

What is the ending that god has yet to
bring?

*[They again utter sharp cries of
terror.]*

Now comes the bombardment of
stones on the battlements!

¹⁶⁰ Beloved Apollo!

Clashing of bronze-rimmed shields at
the gates!

Child of Zeus,²⁰ from whom
comes the clean²¹ conclusion to battle
that decides a war,
and you, blest Queen Onca, dwelling
before the city,²²

¹⁶⁵ protect your seven-gated home.

O gods, you almighty defenders,
O gods and goddesses with decisive
power

to guard the walls of this land,
do not betray this city in the toils of
battle

¹⁷⁰ to an enemy of alien speech!²³

Do not fail to hear, to hear the prayers
of maidens with uplifted hands!

O beloved gods,

¹⁷⁵ stand over our city to liberate it

and show how you love it,
take heed of the people's worship,
take heed, and defend them;

¹⁸⁰⁻⁸²¹ and be mindful, I beg you,
of the city's loving sacrificial rites.

[ETEOCLES *re-enters*.]

ETEOCLES: I ask you, you insufferable creatures, is this the best policy, does it help save our city, does it give confidence to

¹⁸⁵our beleaguered population, to fall down before the images of the city's gods and cry and howl in a way any sensible person would abhor? Whether in trouble or in welcome prosperity, may I not share my home with the female gender! When a woman is in the ascendant, her effrontery is impossible

¹⁹⁰to live with; when she's frightened, she is an even greater menace to family and city. So now, with you running around in all directions like this, your clamour has spread panic and cowardice among the citizens; you are doing your very best to advance the cause of the enemy outside – the city is being

¹⁹⁵sacked by its own people from within! That's the sort of thing you'll get if you live with women! Now then, if anyone fails to obey my command, whether a man or a woman or anything in between, a vote of death will be passed against them and there is no way they will escape execution by public

^{200–201}stoning. Out-of-door affairs are the concern of men; women are not to offer opinions about them. Stay inside and do no harm!

[*The CHORUS make no response.*]

Did you hear me or not? Or am I talking to the deaf?

CHORUS:

Dear son of Oedipus, I was frightened when I heard

the sound of the rattle, the rattle of
chariots,
and the noise of the whirling sockets
of their wheels,
and when the fire-fashioned bits
that are horses' steering-gear
howled in their mouths.

10 ETEOCLES: So what? A sailor can't,
can he, when his ship is in distress
in heavy seas, find an escape from
danger by fleeing from the stern to
the bows?

CHORUS:

No, I rushed headlong to the ancient
images
of the divine ones, trusting in the
gods, when there came the noise
of the deadly blizzard of stones at the
gates:
then, then I rose up in fear to pray to
the blest ones, that they
might spread their protection over the
city.

ETEOCLES: You are praying for our
walls to keep off the enemy attack?
Then that will happen – so far as
the gods are concerned. But then it
is said that the gods of a captured
city leave it.²⁴

CHORUS:

21 or 20
Never while I live may this assembled
company
of gods desert us, nor may I behold
this city
stormed through by the enemy, and
its people
devoured by their fire.

5 ETEOCLES: Please don't call on the
gods while behaving imprudently.
Obedience is mother of Success
and wife of the Saviour²⁵ – that's
how the saying goes.

CHORUS:

True, but the power of god is even
mightier:
often amid troubles he sustains the
helpless,
even out of the direst straits when the
clouds
are hanging over their eyes.

230 ETEOCLES: This is the business of men,
to offer slaughtered sacrifices to
the gods²⁶ when encountering the
enemy; your business is to keep
quiet and stay in your homes.

CHORUS:

It is thanks to the gods that we
dwell in an unconquered city and
that our wall keeps off the enemy
horde.
What kind of resentment can find that
offensive?

ETEOCLES: I don't at all resent your
honouring the race of gods. But in
order to avoid making our citizens
lose heart, be calm and don't get
too excessively frightened.

CHORUS:

As soon as I heard that unprecedented
din
I²⁴⁰ came in terrified fear to this citadel,
this glorious divine abode.

ETEOCLES: Well then, if you learn of
men wounded or dying, don't greet
the news with wailing. That is
what Ares feeds on – the killing of
human beings.

245 CHORUS: Listen, I can hear the
neighing of horses!

ETEOCLES: Well, if you can hear
them, don't over-publicize the fact.

CHORUS: The city is groaning to its
foundations – we're encircled!

ETEOCLES: I'm capable enough of

deciding myself how to deal with this.

CHORUS: I'm frightened! And the clatter at the gates gets louder and louder.

250 ETEOCLES: Will you not keep quiet, instead of talking all about it in public?

CHORUS: Assembled gods, do not betray our walls!

ETEOCLES: Can't you put up with it in silence, confound you?

CHORUS: Gods of my city, let me not fall into slavery!

ETEOCLES: You're putting *yourself* into slavery,²⁷ and me, and the whole city.

255 CHORUS: Almighty Zeus, direct your bolts against the enemy!

ETEOCLES: Zeus, what a race you've given us for company, these women!

CHORUS: A wretched one – just like men when their city is captured.

ETEOCLES: Saying ill-omened words again, are you, while touching the images?²⁸

CHORUS: Because of my lack of courage, fear seized hold of my tongue.

260 ETEOCLES: If you could comply with a slight request I have...

CHORUS: Please explain it right away, and I'll soon understand.

ETEOCLES: Be silent, you poor fool, and don't terrify your own side.

CHORUS: I'll be silent; along with the rest I will endure what fate may bring.

265 ETEOCLES: I accept this word of yours, in preference to your earlier words. Now, in addition to that, get away from the images and utter a better prayer – that the

companions
for the chicks sleeping in her nest.
For some of them march against the
walls²⁹⁵
in full strength, in full mass –
what is to become of me? –
²⁹⁸⁻³⁰⁰ while others hurl
jagged stones at the people of the city,
attacked from all sides.
In every way, you gods
of the family of Zeus, protect the city
and people
of the family of Cadmus!

What land on earth can you take in
exchange
³⁰⁵ that is better than this, if you abandon
to the enemy this land of deep soil
and the water of Dirce,
the best drink for rearing
of all the streams sent forth by
Poseidon the Earth-Encircler
and by the children of Tethys?³⁴
Bearing this in mind, you gods
of the city, cast
upon those outside the walls
³¹⁴⁻¹⁵ the cowardice that destroys men, the
panic that makes them
throw away their arms, and win
glory for these citizens;³⁵
be saviours of the city
and stay in your fair abode
³²⁰ in response to our shrill, wailing
prayers.

For it is pitiful that so ancient a city
should be cast down to Hades, the
enslaved plunder
³²⁷⁻⁵¹ of the spear, contemptuously ravaged
and turned to flaky ashes
by an Achaean man, with divine
permission,
while the women are taken captive
and led away –
ah, ah! – young and old together,

dragged by their hair like horses,³⁶
their clothes being torn off, and the
city

³⁷⁰cries out as it is emptied
of this wretched plunder from which
rises a mingled clamour.

Grievous indeed is the fate I fear!
And it is lamentable when those just
reared³⁷ are plucked unripe
and traverse, before the lawful time,
a³⁷⁵ hateful path away from their homes:
I declare that even the dead
fare better than they do.

For a city when it is conquered –
ah, ah! – suffers many disasters.

³⁸⁰One man leads another captive, or
slays,

or ravages with fire; the whole city
is besmirched with smoke,
and over it blows the blast of the
raging subduer of hosts,
Ares, defiling piety.

³⁸⁵There is tumult throughout the town;
it is enclosed all round
as if by a solid wall;³⁸ man is slain
by man with the spear;
loud, bloody screams

³⁴⁰³⁹⁰⁵⁰rise up from infants
fresh from the nourishing breast.

And Pillage is there, sister to

Rampage:

plunderer meets plunderer
and plunderless calls to plunderless
wanting to have him as a colleague –
they³⁵⁵ desire neither a lesser nor an
equal share.

What sufferings may one guess will
follow that?

Grain of every sort, spilled on the
ground,

pains the eye, having acquired
unfriendly store-keepers;³⁹

³⁶⁰⁶²and the earth's rich gifts

in mingled confusion are blown about
in gusts of worthless trash.
Slave-girls new to suffering
<will soon be enduring> a captive
coupling
with a lucky man, for
they can expect to come to a
nocturnal consummation
with the dominating enemy,
the climax of their utterly wretched
afflictions.

[*The SCOUT is seen returning in
haste.*]

A VOICE FROM THE CHORUS: It seems
to me, you know, my

³⁶⁹⁻⁷⁰dears, that the scout is bringing us
fresh news of the army: he is
forcing the sockets of his feet to
move him rapidly.

[*ETEOCLES is seen returning in haste
from the opposite direction;
attendants follow, carrying his
armour.*]

ANOTHER VOICE: And here is the king
himself, the son of Oedipus, just at
the precise time to learn what the
messenger has to say: speed is
making his gait uneven too.

³⁷⁵ SCOUT: I can state from accurate
knowledge the dispositions of the
enemy, and how each has received
his allotted station at the gates.
Tydeus is already growling near
the Proetid Gate, but the prophet⁴⁰
is not allowing him to cross the

³⁸⁰river Ismenus, because the
sacrifices are not giving good
signs. Tydeus, lusting madly for
battle, is screaming like a snake
hissing at midday,⁴¹ and is
belabouring the wise prophet, the
son of Oecles, with insults, saying
that he is cringing before death

and battle through cowardice. As
 he utters these cries, he
³⁸⁵shakes three crests casting long
 shadows, the mane of his helmet,
 and on the underside of his shield
 bells of beaten bronze make a
 terrifying clang. Fashioned upon
 his shield he bears this proud
 device: a blazing firmament full of
 stars. Conspicuous
³⁹⁰in the centre of the shield is a
 brilliant full moon, the greatest of
 the stars, the eye of night. Raving
 thus, in his boastful armour, he
 screams by the banks of the river,
 longing for battle, like a horse
 panting against the force of bit and
 bridle
³⁹⁵and impatiently awaiting the
 sound of the trumpet. Whom will
 you station to oppose this man?
 Who can be relied on to stand
 before Proetus' Gate when its bolts
 are undrawn?

ETEOCLES: I would not tremble at the
 accoutrements of any man; and
 shield devices cannot inflict
 wounds, nor can crests

⁴⁰⁰or bells hurt without a spear. As
 for this 'night' which you say is on
 his shield, glittering with the stars
 of heaven – well, perhaps
 someone's folly⁴² may prove
 prophetic. For if the night of death
 should fall on his eyes, then this
 boastful device
⁴⁰⁵would prove to be rightly and
 properly true to its name for its
 bearer, and he will have made this
 arrogant prophecy against himself.
 I will post against Tydeus, as
 defender of this
⁴¹⁰gate, the brave son of Astacus, a
 man of very noble birth and one

who honours the throne of
Modesty and hates arrogant words;
for he never does a shameful deed,
and to be cowardly is not his way.
He is a scion arising from the Sown
Men whom Ares spared,⁴³ and a
man of this land through and
through: Melanippus. Ares will
decide the issue with his dice;
⁴¹⁵but it is very much the just duties
of kinship that send him forth to
protect the mother that bore him⁴⁴
from the enemy's spear.

CHORUS:

May the gods grant good fortune to
him who contends
on my behalf, for he is standing up
to be a righteous defender of the city!
But I tremble
⁴²⁰to see the bloody deaths of men who
perish
fighting for their dear ones.

SCOUT: So indeed may the gods grant
him good fortune! Capaneus has
been allotted the position at the
Electran Gate.

^{424–57}This second one is a giant,⁴⁵ bigger
than the man previously
mentioned,⁴⁶ and his boasts show a
pride beyond human limits; for he
says that he will sack the city, god
willing or unwilling, and that not
even the weapons of Zeus crashing
down to earth will stand in his way
or hold him back – he
⁴³⁰compares the lightnings and
thunderbolts to the heat of the
noonday sun. As his device he
bears a naked man carrying fire:
the torch with which he is armed
blazes in his hands, and in golden
letters he declares, 'I will burn the
city'. Against

⁴³⁵such a man you must send – but
who can stand against him? Who
will await without panic the onset
of this braggart man?

ETEOCLES: Now our first gain has
given birth to yet another:⁴⁷ men's
foolish pride, you see, finds a
truthful accuser in their

⁴⁴⁰own tongues. Capaneus is *voicing*
threats against men who are ready
to *act*. With contempt for the gods
he takes a foolish joy, mortal as he
is, in exercising his mouth by
sending up to heaven loud,
seething words against Zeus: I am
certain that he will get his deserts,
when something comes to him

⁴⁴⁵'carrying fire' – the thunderbolt,⁴⁸
and not a mere image of it either.
Excessively loud-mouthed he may
be, but a man has been posted
against him who is fiery in spirit:
powerful Polyphontes,

⁴⁵⁰who will be a reliable defender
with the goodwill of Artemis the
Protectress⁴⁹ and the aid of the
other gods. Name another man
who has been allotted to another
gate.

CHORUS:

May he perish, he who makes these
great boastful threats against the
city!

May the thunderbolt stop him

⁴⁵⁵Before ever he leaps upon my house
and plunders me by arrogant armed
force
from my maiden abode!

SCOUT: I will name him. The third
man, for whom the third

⁴⁶⁰lot sprang out of the upturned
helmet of fine bronze, to lead his
company against the Neïstan Gate,

is Eteocles. He is circling with his horses, who are snorting in their harness, eager to fall upon the gate; their muzzles, filled with the breath of their proud nostrils, are whistling a barbarian

⁴⁶⁵music. His shield is decorated in no petty style. A fully armed soldier is climbing a scaling ladder to the top of the enemy's wall, aiming to sack the city; and he too is crying out in written syllables, saying that not even Ares can throw him

⁴⁷⁰off the wall. Against this man too you must send someone who can be relied on to save this city from the yoke of slavery.

ETEOCLES: He has been sent already, bearing his boast in his hands⁵⁰ – Megareus, son of Creon,⁵¹ of the race of the Sown

⁴⁷⁵Men. He will not be terrified into retreating from the gate by the noise of horses' wild neighing: he will either, by his death, pay his full debt of nurture to this land, or else will adorn his father's house with booty after conquering two men⁵² and

⁴⁸⁰the city on the shield. Brag about another one;⁵³ don't be grudging about informing me.

CHORUS:

Truly I pray that fortune may be with you,
O defender of my home, and may not be with them:
as they bluster loudly against the city
⁴⁸⁴with maddened heart, so may an indignant
Zeus look upon them with wrath!

SCOUT: Another, the fourth, assigned

to the neighbouring Gate

^{489–90} of Athena Onca, is standing near it
uttering loud cries, the vast figure
and form of Hippomedon. I
shuddered, I won't deny it, to see
him brandish his great round
threshing-floor of a shield. And it
can't have been a cheap artist who
gave him that device on the shield,
Typhon⁵⁴ emitting dark smoke, the
many-coloured sister of flame,
from his fire-breathing

⁴⁹⁵ lips; the round circle of the hollow-
bellied shield is floored with
coiling snakes.⁵⁵ The man himself
raised a great war cry; he is
possessed by Ares, and he rages for
a fight like a maenad,⁵⁶ with a
fearsome look in his eye. You need
to guard

⁵⁰⁰ well against the attack of a man
like this: Terror itself is now
vaunting at the gate.

ETEOCLES: In the first place, Pallas
Onca, close neighbour to our city's
gate, hates this man's arrogance
and will keep him off, like a
mother bird protecting her
nestlings from a hostile

^{504–5} serpent. And a man has been
chosen to face this man:
Hyperbius, the brave son of
Oenops, ready to learn his fate in
this crisis of fortune, faultless in
form, in spirit, and also in the
handling of arms. And Hermes⁵⁷
has brought them together
appropriately: the man is an
enemy of the man he will face,⁵⁸

⁵¹⁰ and on their shields they will bring
together two antagonistic gods.
One of them has the fire-breathing
Typhon, and on

⁵¹⁵ Hyperbius' shield resides Father

Zeus, standing with his flaming bolt in his hand. Such are their alliances with gods; and we are on the side of the winners, they of the losers – that is if Zeus is Typhon's superior in battle. It is to be expected that the human opponents will fare likewise, and
520 by the logic of Hyperbius' emblem the Zeus he has on his shield should become his Saviour.⁵⁹

CHORUS:

I am confident that he who has on his shield
the adversary of Zeus, the unlovely form of an earth-born divinity, an image hateful to mortals and to the long-lived gods, will lose his head before the gates!

–8 SCOUT: So may it be. Now I tell you of the fifth, assigned to the fifth gate, the North Gate, right by the tomb of

536–7 Amphin, ⁶⁰ son of Zeus. He stands there with a savage pride, not at all in keeping with his maidenish name, ⁶¹ and a fierce
529–30 eye. He swears by the spear he holds, resolved to revere it more than a god and more highly than his eyes, that he will sack the city of the Cadmeans by force. He who says this is the offspring of Ares by a mountain-dwelling mother, ⁶² a
534–5 fair-faced man, little more than a boy: the down is just growing
538 thick and spreading over his cheeks as he comes to the prime of beauty. But he does not stand before the gate without
539–42 a boastful emblem: on his shield of beaten bronze, the circular protector of his body, he wielded

our city's disgrace, the Sphinx,
eater of raw flesh, her bright form
beaten out and fastened on with
rivets, and under her she bears a
man, one of the Cadmeans – so
that a great many weapons may
⁵⁴⁵be thrown at that man.⁶³ Having
come here, he is not likely to fight
on a petty scale, nor to show
himself unworthy of the long
journey he has made:
Parthenopaeus the Arcadian. This
man, such as I have described – an
immigrant, paying back to Argos
the debt due for his fine
upbringing⁶⁴ – is making threats
against these walls which may god
not fulfil!

⁵⁵⁰ ETEOCLES: May they receive from the
gods a fate that matches their own
intentions, they and those unholy
boasts of theirs; then they would
surely perish utterly and
wretchedly! But for this man too,
the Arcadian you speak of, there is
a man who

⁵⁵⁵does not boast but whose hand can
see what needs to be done – Actor,
brother of the last-mentioned. He
will not allow a tongue with no
deeds to its credit to flood in
through the gates⁶⁵ and breed
trouble, nor that hateful, hurtful
beast

⁵⁶⁰to pass from the outside to the
inside. She will blame her bearer
when she gets an intense pounding
below the city walls! If the gods
are willing, what I speak will be
the truth.

CHORUS:

Their words pierce through my breast,
and each lock of my hair stands up on
end

when I hear the loud boasts of these
loud-mouthed,
impious men. If the gods are really
gods,
may they destroy them in this land!

SCOUT: The sixth man I have to speak
of is a man of the highest virtue
and an excellent fighter, powerful
Amphiaraus, the

⁵⁷⁰prophet. Stationed before the
Homoloïd Gate, he is casting many
reviling words at powerful Tydeus
– ‘murderer’,⁶⁶ ‘wrecker of your
city’, ‘Argos’ great instructor in
evil’, ‘arouser of a Fury’,⁶⁷ ‘high
priest of Carnage’, ‘Adrastus’
⁵⁷⁵counsellor in these crimes’. And
then again he loudly addresses
your brother, turning his name
inside out and
⁵⁸⁰dwelling on its significance,⁶⁸ and
these are the words he utters from
his lips: ‘Is an act like this really
smiled on by the gods, is it an
honourable thing for posterity to
hear and tell of, to devastate one’s
fatherland and its native gods by
bringing a foreign army to invade
it? What claim of justice can
quench the mother-source, and if
your fatherland is conquered
⁵⁸⁵by the spear thanks to your
incitement, how can you expect it
to be your ally? For my part, I will
enrich this land by becoming a
prophet buried in the soil of the
enemy.⁶⁹ Let
⁵⁹⁰us do battle: I expect an
honourable death.’ So the prophet
spoke, wielding calmly his shield
all of bronze. On its circle there
was no image; for he desires not
the appearance of excellence but
the reality, harvesting a deep

furrow in his
595 mind from which good counsels
grow.⁷⁰ Against him I advise you to
send brave and skilful opponents:
formidable is he who reveres the
gods.

ETEOCLES: Alas for the fate that visits
mortals and links a righteous man
with his impious inferiors! In every
activity

600 there is nothing worse than evil
company; it is a crop best not
reaped. Either a virtuous man
boards a ship together with sailors
engaged in some headstrong
villainy and perishes along with
that god-detested set of men, or
else an honest

605 man in the company of fellow-
citizens, men who hate foreigners
and are unmindful of the gods, is
caught unjustly in the same net as
they, and is lashed and laid low,
together with them all, by the
scourge of god. So too this seer,
the son

610 of Oecles, a virtuous, upright,
courageous and pious man, a great
prophet, has joined together
against his will⁷¹ with impious men
of arrogant speech, who are
marching one after another down a
road on which it's a long journey
to come back;⁷² and, Zeus willing,
he will be dragged down with

615 them. Indeed, I do not think he
will attack the gate at all – not
because he is lacking in spirit or
cowardly in character, but he
knows that he is destined to die in
the battle, if the oracle of Loxias⁷³
is to bear fruit (and his habit is to
be either

620 silent or accurate). Nevertheless

we shall post a man against him:
powerful Lasthenes, a gatekeeper
hostile to intruders, who has
developed a mature mind but
youthful flesh; his eye is swift, and
in action he is not slow to seize
with his spear on a spot exposed
by a movement of the shield – but
mortals’

⁶²⁵good fortune is the gift of god.

CHORUS:

Hear, you gods, our righteous prayers,
and fulfil them, that the city may
prosper,
turning the evils of the armed struggle
against

⁶²⁹⁻³⁰the invaders of our land: may Zeus
strike them, outside the walls,
and slay them with his thunderbolt!

SCOUT: Now this is the seventh, at
the Seventh Gate:⁷⁴ your

⁶³⁵own brother. I will tell what a fate
and curse he prays may befall this
city,⁷⁵ sounding out a jubilant
paean for its capture: to join battle
with you, kill you and die beside
you, or else, if you survive, to
punish you, as the one who
degraded him

⁶³⁹⁻⁴¹and drove him out, in the same
manner – by banishment. Such is
the cry of powerful Polyneices, and
he is calling on the ancestral gods
of his fatherland to look
favourably on his prayers in every
way. He has a new-fashioned, well-
rounded shield, and a double
device cunningly worked upon it:
one

⁶⁴⁵beholds a man-at-arms, made of
gold, led by a woman who walks
ahead of him with modest gait.
And, as the writing proclaims, she

says that she is Justice, 'and I will bring this man back from exile, and he will possess his father's city and

^{649, 651}the right to dwell in his home'.
Such are the devices of those men
– for you will never have reason to criticize me for my reports; now you yourself must decide how to command⁷⁶ the city.
[*He departs.*]

ETEOCLES: O my family, driven mad
and greatly hated by the gods, my
family so full of tears, the house of
Oedipus! Ah

⁶⁵⁵me, my father's curse is truly now fulfilled! But it is not proper to cry or lament, lest that give birth to grief even harder to bear. For this man so well named⁷⁷ – Polyneices, I mean – we shall soon know where that blazon will end up,
⁶⁶⁰whether those letters worked in gold, blathering insanely on his shield, are really going to bring him home. If Justice, the virgin daughter of Zeus, were actually present in his actions and his mind, that might possibly have been the case. But in
⁶⁶⁵fact, neither when he escaped the darkness of the womb, nor when he was growing, nor when he reached adolescence, nor when his chin was gathering hair, did Justice ever set eyes on him or hold him in any honour; nor now, surely, when he does harm to his own fatherland, is she standing close by
⁶⁷⁰him, I imagine. Truly Justice would be utterly false to her name if she consorted with a man with so utterly audacious a mind.

Trusting in this, I will go and stand
against him myself: who else has a
better right to? I will stand as ruler
⁶⁷⁵against ruler, brother against
brother, enemy against enemy. [*To
one of his attendants:*] Give me my
greaves at once, to protect me
against spear and shaft.
[*During the following exchanges,*
ETEOCLES, *with the help of his
attendants, is putting on his armour.*]

CHORUS: No, dearest of men, son of
Oedipus, do not let your passions
make you like that utterer of evil
words! There are

⁶⁷⁹⁻⁸⁰enough Cadmean men to go to
battle with the Argives; such blood
purifies itself.⁷⁸ But the death of
two men of the same blood killing
each other – that pollution can
never grow old.

ETEOCLES [*who has meanwhile put on
his greaves*]:

If one must suffer evil, let it not be
shameful; that is the only
⁶⁸⁵profit the dead can gain. You can
never speak of a good reputation
arising from a disaster which is
also a disgrace.

CHORUS:

Why this mad passion, child?⁷⁹
You must not let yourself be
carried away by this spear-mad
delusion that fills your heart.
Cast out the root of this evil desire!

ETEOCLES [*who has meanwhile put on his
corslet*]: Since the

⁶⁹⁰god is plainly hastening things to
their conclusion, let it run before
the wind, the whole house of
Laius, hated by Phoebus and
consigned to the waves of

CHORUS:

An all too harshly stinging lust is
provoking you
to perpetrate a homicide, shedding
unlawful blood,
that will bear bitter fruit.

ETEOCLES [*who has meanwhile buckled
on his sword*]: Yes,

⁶⁹⁵for the hateful <black(?)> Curse
of the father who should have
loved me sits close by me with dry,
tearless eyes,⁸¹ saying, 'The gain
comes before the death that comes
after.'

CHORUS:

Don't be provoked! You will not be
called a coward
⁶⁹⁹⁻⁷⁰⁰if you find an honourable way to
stay alive; the Fury's black squall
will leave your house, once the gods
receive a sacrifice at your hands.

ETEOCLES [*who has meanwhile put on
his helmet*]: The gods, it seems,
have already abandoned us, and
will they honour any gift from us,
doomed as we are? Why then
should we still cringe before the
fate of death?

CHORUS:

⁷⁰⁵Stay, while you have the chance!
For the controlling power may
perhaps, given time, change the
wind of your spirit and blow with
a gentler breath;
but at present it is still seething.

ETEOCLES [*who has meanwhile taken
up his shield and spear*]:

⁷¹⁰Yes, for the curse of Oedipus has
made it seethe: it was too true,
what I saw in those dream-visions
about the dividing of our father's
property.⁸²

CHORUS: Listen to us women, even if
you don't like doing so.

ETEOCLES: You can say what's
helpful, but don't make it lengthy.

CHORUS: Don't make this journey to
the Seventh Gate.

15 ETEOCLES: I am whetted, and your
words will not blunt me.

CHORUS: Yet god respects even an
inglorious victory.

ETEOCLES: That's not an expression
that a man-at-arms should tolerate.

CHORUS: You want to shed the blood
of your own brother?

ETEOCLES: When the gods send evil,
one cannot escape it.

[He departs.]

CHORUS:

I shudder at that destroyer of families,
that goddess unlike the gods,
that all-too-true prophet of evil,
the Fury of the father's curse,
that it has fulfilled the angry
imprecations
of Oedipus' warped mind:
this strife that will destroy his
children is hastening it on.

And a foreigner is dividing their
inheritances,
a Chalybian migrant from Scythia,⁸³
729-80 a harsh distributor of property,
cruel-hearted Iron,
allotting them land to dwell in,
as much as is given to the dead to
possess,⁸⁴
with no share of the broad plains.

744-51 And when they die in kindred
slaughter,
killed by one another, and the dust of
earth
drinks up their dark red, clotted
blood,

who can provide purification,
who can release them?⁸⁵ O
⁷³⁹⁻⁴⁰new troubles for the house
mingling with its old woes!

For I speak of the transgression
⁷⁴¹born long ago, punished swiftly but
remaining to the third
generation, when Laius, defying
Apollo, who had told him thrice⁸⁶
at the central navel of earth,
the oracular sanctuary of Pytho, to die
without issue and so save his city,
⁷⁵⁰mastered by his own cherished,
unwise counsels,
begot his own death,
Oedipus the father-slayer,
who sowed the sacrosanct soil
of his mother, where he had been
nurtured,
⁷⁵⁵and suffered a blood-stained progeny:
it was mindless madness
that brought that bridal couple⁸⁷
together.

Now the sea, as it were, is bringing
waves of trouble;
the first one subsides, but it raises up
another
⁷⁶⁰of triple strength, which breaks loudly
around the very poop of the city;
and for protection, in between,
stretches the slim breadth of this wall.
I fear lest together with the princes
⁷⁶⁵the city may be laid low.

Fulfilled is the grievous reconciliation
spoken of in the curse long ago:⁸⁸
destruction does not pass by.
⁷⁶⁸⁻⁷¹Among men who earn a living,
prosperity grown too fat
leads to the cargo being thrown
overboard from the stern.

For what man was so much admired

by the gods in their shared abode⁸⁹
and by the much-trodden meeting
place of mortals⁹⁰
as⁷⁷⁵ in those days they admired Oedipus
who removed from the land
the man-snatching demon?⁹¹

But when he became aware,
wretched man, of his appalling
marriage,
⁷⁸⁰enraged by grief,
with maddened heart,
he perpetrated two evils:
by his own father-slaying hand
he was robbed of his < >
eyes,⁹²

and⁷⁸⁵, angered with his sons
for their wretched maintenance of
him,⁹³ he let fly at them
(ah, ah!) the curses of a bitter tongue,
⁷⁸⁹⁻⁹⁰that they would actually one day
divide his property between them
with iron-wielding hand. And now I
tremble
lest the swift-footed Fury may fulfil
this.

[A MESSENGER *enters from the
direction of the battlefield.*]

MESSENGER: Have no fear, you
daughters born of <noble Cad-
mean> mothers: this city has
escaped the yoke of slavery. The
boasts of mighty men have fallen
to the ground, and, as

⁷⁹⁵in fair weather, so too when much
buffeted by the waves, the city has
let no water into her hull. The wall
has held, and the champions with
whom we reinforced the gates
proved reliable in single combat.
Things are well for the most part –
⁸⁰⁰at six gates; but at the Seventh the
victor was the awesome Master of

Sevens,⁹⁴ Lord Apollo, wreaking
the consequences of Laius' old act
of unwisdom upon the offspring of
Oedipus.

CHORUS: What further untoward
thing has happened to the city?

805 MESSENGER: The men have died at
each other's hands.

CHORUS: Who? What are you saying?
Your words are frightening me out
of my mind.

MESSENGER: Collect yourself, and
listen. The sons of Oedipus –

CHORUS: Ah, wretched me! I can
foresee the worst!

MESSENGER: < >

CHORUS: < > ⁹⁵

MESSENGER: – nor is there any doubt
that they were smitten down –

810 CHORUS: And lie there? It is grievous
news, but all the same, say it.

MESSENGER: They killed each other
with hands that all too truly shared
the same blood. Thus the
controlling power was one and the
same for both, and he has himself
utterly destroyed that ill-fated
family. Such are the things we
have

815 to rejoice and to weep over: the
city is faring well, but its chiefs,
the leaders of the two armies, have
had the whole possession of their
inheritance divided between them
by hammered Scythian iron: they
will have so much of the land as
819 they will take in burial, having
been swept away to an evil fate in
accordance with their father's
curse.

[*He departs.*]

CHORUS:⁹⁶

{⁹² O great Zeus and you gods of the
city,

who <have shown your concern> to
save
these walls of Cadmus,
shall I hail with shouts of joy
the unharmed salvation of the city,
or shall I weep for the wretched, ill-
starred,
childless warlords
who have verily perished in a manner
appropriate to their names –
with ‘true glory’ and with ‘much
strife’⁹⁷ –
because of their impious thoughts?}
O black, fulfilled curse
of the family and of Oedipus!
A terrible chill descends about my
heart.

⁸⁶⁵⁻⁶ In maenad-like frenzy I fashion
a song for their tomb, having heard
about these blood-dripping corpses
that die
so wretchedly: truly ill-omened
was this spear-duet!

If⁴⁰ took full effect, it did not fail,
the father’s cursing word;
the disobedient decision of Laius has
been a lasting force.
There is lamentation throughout the
city:

oracles do not lose their edge.
⁸⁴⁵ O much-mourned pair, this thing you
have done
is <atrocious>! Sufferings have come
that cannot be talked about, only
bewailed.

[*The bodies of ETEOCLES and
Polyneices are brought on and laid
down side by side.*]

Here it is, plain to see; the messenger’s
words are visible reality;
with double lamentation <I now
behold(?)> this twin disaster;
the sad event is fulfilled, a double

death by kindred hands.

⁸⁵⁰What shall I say?

What else but that suffering is a
resident in the house?

Friends, with the wind of lamentation
in your sails

⁸⁵⁵ply in accompaniment the regular
beating of hands on head,⁹⁸

which is for ever crossing the
Acheron,⁹⁹

propelling on a sacred mission from
which there is no return¹⁰⁰

the black-sailed ship,

on which Apollo Paeon never treads¹⁰¹
and the sun never shines,

⁸⁶⁰to the invisible shores that welcome
all.

{ [*Enter* ANTIGONE *and* ISMENE.¹⁰²]

But here come Antigone and Ismene
to fulfil a bitter duty.

⁸⁶⁵I think they will undoubtedly utter
a lament for their brothers from their
lovely

deep bosoms; their grief merits it.

But it is right that we, <having
heard> the news first,

should raise the unpleasing sound
of the Fury's hymn, and sing
the hateful paeon of Hades.

Off,

you most unhappy in your brothers of
all

who bind a sash round their garments!
I weep, I groan, and there is no deceit
about it –

I am raising my voice sincerely from
the heart.}

FIRST SEMICHORUS:¹⁰³

Oh, oh, foolish ones,

⁸⁷⁰who ignored friendly advice, whom
disaster could not deter,
wretched ones, who captured
your own father's house with the
point of the spear!

SECOND SEMICHORUS:

Wretched ones indeed, who found
themselves
wretched deaths, to the ruin of their
house!

FIRST SEMICHORUS:

⁸⁸⁰Oh, oh, you who sent crashing in ruin
the walls of your home, who found a
bitter end
to your dreams of sole rulership, now
⁸⁸⁴you are reconciled – by steel.

SECOND SEMICHORUS:

⁸⁸⁶And the mighty Fury of your father
Oedipus
fulfilled itself in very truth.

FIRST SEMICHORUS:

Stricken through your left sides,
yes, stricken, through
⁸⁹⁰the ribs moulded in the same womb
< >.
Alas, you possessed ones!
Alas, the curse that doomed you to
mutual death!

SECOND SEMICHORUS:

⁸⁹⁵You speak of them as being struck a
blow
that was fatal for their house as well
as their bodies,
struck by the silent power
and the unambiguous doom
of their father's curse.

FIRST SEMICHORUS:

⁹⁰⁰Grieving has spread right through the
city:
the walls groan, and so
does the soil that loved these men;
their property
awaits < new owners >,
that property over which a dreadful
fate came to them,
⁹⁰⁵over which came strife and death as
its end.

SECOND SEMICHORUS:

With whetted hearts they parted
their possessions, so as to gain equal
lots;
but their friends do not see
their reconciler¹⁰⁴ as free of blame,
or Ares as pleasing.⁹¹⁰

FIRST SEMICHORUS:

By the stroke of iron they are as they
are now,
and there await them, one might well
say,
portions of their father's sepulchre
dug by the stroke of iron.

SECOND SEMICHORUS:

⁹¹¹They are accompanied to the grave
by the loud-sounding, heart-rending
wailing of a house that grieves for
itself, that feels its own pain,
the wailing of a miserable heart that
rejects all joy,
truly pouring tears
from a heart that withers as I lament⁹²⁰
over these two princes.

FIRST SEMICHORUS:

One can say over these unhappy men
that they did much to their fellow-
citizens
and to the ranks of foreigners brought
from abroad,
many of whom were destroyed in⁹²⁵
battle.

SECOND SEMICHORUS:

Unhappy is she who bore them
beyond all women
who are called mothers of children:¹⁰⁵
⁹²⁹She made her own child
her husband and bore these sons, and
they
have perished thus at each other's
fraternal, slaughtering hands.

FIRST SEMICHORUS:

Fraternal indeed, but utterly destroyed
by a parting¹⁰⁶ that was not friendly
in an insane conflict⁹³⁵
that put a stop to their strife.

SECOND SEMICHORUS:

Their hatred is ended, and their life-
strength
is mingled in the earth⁹³⁸⁻⁴⁰
as it flows with gore: truly they are of
one blood!
A harsh resolver of disputes is the
visitor
from the sea,¹⁰⁷ who comes out of fire,
whetted Iron, and harsh too is Ares,
that evil divider of property, who has
made
the father's curse come true.

FIRST SEMICHORUS:

They have received their allotted
portion, the wretched pair,
through suffering sent by Zeus;
under their bodies there will be
a limitless wealth of land.⁹⁵¹⁻¹⁰⁸

SECOND SEMICHORUS:

O you who have adorned your family
—
with many sorrows!
Over your deaths the Curses¹⁰⁹ have
shrilled
their high-pitched cry of triumph,
having put the family
to flight in utter rout.
Ruin's trophy stands at the gate
at which they were struck down, and
the controlling power
has defeated two men and ended its
work.

FIRST SEMICHORUS:¹¹⁰

You struck after being struck.

SECOND SEMICHORUS:

You were killed after
killing.¹¹¹

FIRST SEMICHORUS:

	You killed with the spear.
SECOND SEMICHORUS:	
	You died by the spear.
FIRST SEMICHORUS:	
	Having striven grievously –
SECOND SEMICHORUS:	
	Having suffered grievously –
FIRST SEMICHORUS:	
	You lie dead.
SECOND SEMICHORUS:	
	You have killed.
FIRST SEMICHORUS:	
	Let lamentation flow.
SECOND SEMICHORUS:	
	Let tears flow.
FIRST SEMICHORUS:	
	<i>Aiee!</i>
SECOND SEMICHORUS:	
	<i>Aiee!</i>
FIRST SEMICHORUS:	
	My mind is mad with grief.
SECOND SEMICHORUS:	
	My heart groans within me.
FIRST SEMICHORUS:	
	Oh, oh, you are utterly to be bewailed!
SECOND SEMICHORUS:	
	And you, for your part, are in utter wretchedness!
FIRST SEMICHORUS:	
	You died at kindred hands.
SECOND SEMICHORUS:	
	You slew a kindred man.
FIRST SEMICHORUS:	
	Double to speak of –
SECOND SEMICHORUS:	
	And double to behold –
FIRST SEMICHORUS:	
	Are the sufferings of these < two (?) > close together here.
SECOND SEMICHORUS:	
	Like brothers these brothers have fallen.
CHORUS:	

O⁷⁷Destiny, grievous dispenser of heavy
fate,
and mighty shade of Oedipus!
O black Fury, truly you are powerful!

FIRST SEMICHORUS:

Aiee!

SECOND SEMICHORUS:

Aiee!

FIRST SEMICHORUS:

Suffering hard to look on –

SECOND SEMICHORUS:

He made me see, caused by his
banishment.

FIRST SEMICHORUS:

He⁹⁸⁰ did not come back after he had
killed.¹¹²

SECOND SEMICHORUS:

He came, and lost his life.

FIRST SEMICHORUS:

Yes,⁹⁸² he lost it indeed.

SECOND SEMICHORUS:

And slew this other.

FIRST SEMICHORUS:

Terrible⁹⁸³ to speak of –

SECOND SEMICHORUS:

And terrible to behold –

FIRST SEMICHORUS:

Are⁹⁸⁴ these lamentable kindred sorrows
–

SECOND SEMICHORUS:

These⁹⁸⁵ still-fresh, thrice-hurled¹¹³
sufferings.

CHORUS:

O Destiny, grievous dispenser of heavy
fate,
and mighty shade of Oedipus!
O black Fury, truly you are powerful!

FIRST SEMICHORUS:

You know about it¹¹⁴ for sure, having
experienced it –

SECOND SEMICHORUS:

And⁹⁹⁰ you too, having learned not a
moment later –

FIRST SEMICHORUS:

When you came back to the city –

SECOND SEMICHORUS:

To combat this man with the spear.

FIRST SEMICHORUS:

Wretched race –

SECOND SEMICHORUS:

That has suffered wretchedly!

FIRST SEMICHORUS:

Off, the toil –

SECOND SEMICHORUS:

Oh, the trouble –

FIRST SEMICHORUS:

– for the house –

SECOND SEMICHORUS:

– and the land!¹¹⁵

FIRST SEMICHORUS:

Oh, oh, my prince, your lamentable sufferings!

SECOND SEMICHORUS:

< Oh, oh, ! >

FIRST SEMICHORUS:

Oh, both so much afflicted in every way!

SECOND SEMICHORUS:

Oh, both possessed by the spirit of Ruin!

FIRST SEMICHORUS:

Oh, where in the land shall we inter them?

SECOND SEMICHORUS:

Oh, in the place of greatest honour.

FIRST SEMICHORUS:

Oh, oh, a pain to their father, if they sleep where he does!¹¹⁶

[The last few lines of the original text have been lost; the two SEMICHORUSES must have agreed on where ETEOCLES and Polyneices should be buried, and escorted the bodies off stage.]

{ *[Enter a HERALD.* ¹¹⁷]

005 HERALD: I have to announce the opinion and the decision of the

people's council of this city of Cadmus. It has been resolved that Eteocles here, on account of his loyalty to his country, shall be buried in the loving recesses of the earth;

¹⁰¹⁰for he found death while keeping out the enemy at the gates, and in pious defence of the temples of his fathers he has died blamelessly where it is honourable for the young to die. That is what I have been instructed to say about him; but his brother, the dead Polyneices here, is to be cast out unburied,

¹⁰¹⁵a prey for the dogs, as one who would have been the destroyer of the land of Cadmus, had not some god stood up to hinder his armed attack. Even in death he shall bear the pollution and curse of his ancestral gods, whom he insulted when he

¹⁰²⁰tried to capture the city, bringing a foreign army to attack it. So it is decided that he should get his due reward by receiving a dishonourable funeral from the flying birds; that he should neither lie under a laboriously raised burial mound nor be dignified with high-pitched musical wailings; and that he

¹⁰²⁵should not have the honour of a funeral procession from his family. Such is the decision of the aforementioned Cadmean authorities.

ANTIGONE: And *I* say to the leaders of the Cadmeans: if no one else is willing to join in burying this man, I will bury him; I will brave the danger of burying my brother, and

I will

¹⁰³⁰not be ashamed to display such
disobedient insubordination to the
city. The power of the common
womb from which we are sprung,
children of a wretched mother and
a miserable father, is a formidable
thing. Therefore, my soul, with a
sister's heart, living with dead,
share willingly in the sufferings
¹⁰³⁵that he endures unwillingly. His
flesh < shall not be eaten by dogs
or birds > nor torn by hollow-
bellied wolves – let no one think it
will; for I shall myself, woman
though I am, contrive to provide
him with a funeral and burial,
carrying
¹⁰⁴⁰it ¹¹⁸in the fold of my fine linen
robe, and myself cover him up –
and let no one think otherwise.
Courage will find a means to do it.

HERALD: I tell you not to flout the
city's will by doing this.

ANTIGONE: I tell you not to make
useless proclamations to me.

HERALD: But a people that has
escaped danger can be brutal.

⁰⁴⁵ ANTIGONE: Be brutal! But this man is
not going to remain unburied.

HERALD: This man whom the city
hates, you are going to honour him
by burial?

ANTIGONE: Yes, if his rights are not
dishonoured by the gods.

HERALD: They weren't, until he cast
this country into danger.

ANTIGONE: He was retaliating with
harm for the harm he had suffered.

⁰⁵⁰ HERALD: But he retaliated against the
whole people for the act of just
one.

ANTIGONE: Contentiousness always

wants the last word! I'm going to
bury him; don't argue any more.

HERALD: Well, be self-willed! But I
forbid it.
[*He leaves.*]

FIRST SEMICHORUS [*now grouped, with*
ANTIGONE, around Polyneices'
body]:

Alas, alas!
O⁹⁵⁵ you vaunting destroyers of families,
Keres, Furies,¹¹⁹ who have thus
annihilated
the family of Oedipus, root and
branch!
What can I let happen, what can I do,
what plan can I devise?
How can I bring myself neither to
bewail you
nor to escort you to a funeral?

SECOND SEMICHORUS [*now grouped,*
with ISMENE, around ETEOCLES'
body]:

I¹⁰⁶⁰ am afraid, and shun conflict
with the fearsome citizenry.
You will find many mourners;
but he, wretched man, will go
unlamented
with only the single-voiced dirge of
his weeping sister.
Now¹⁰⁶⁵ who could believe that?

FIRST SEMICHORUS:

Let the city do or not do what it likes
to those who mourn Polyneices:
we here will go and join
¹⁰⁶⁹⁻⁷⁰ in escorting him to his burial. For the
loss
is the loss of all the race < of
Cadmus > ,
and the city approves different things
as right at different times.

SECOND SEMICHORUS:

And we will go with this man, as both
the city
and justice join in approving:

for, next after the blest ones and the
strength of Zeus,
he¹⁰⁷⁵ did most to prevent the city of the
Cadmeans
being destroyed and overwhelmed
by the human wave of foreigners.

[ANTIGONE *and the* FIRST

SEMICHORUS *go out in one direction,*
escorting the body of Polyneices;

ISMENE *and the* SECOND SEMICHORUS
in the other direction, escorting the
body of ETEOCLES.]]

The Theban Tetralogy

1. LAIUS

Our direct evidence for the first play of the tetralogy is very scanty. There is a tiny scrap of a papyrus headnote ('Hypothesis') stating that Laius was the opening speaker; two one-word quotations, one of them (fr. 122) relating to the practice of exposing unwanted newborn infants in pots; a lexicon entry mentioning that in this play there was a reference to a murderer who tasted and spat out his victim's blood (fr. 122a); and a three-line quotation (fr. 387a; see below) which looks like part of a messenger's narrative of the murder of Laius – though it is also possible that this comes from the following play, Oedipus. The murder, if that is what is being related, took place, in Aeschylus' treatment, not (as in Sophocles) in Phocis on the way to Delphi but at Potniae, a mile or two to the south of Thebes. In addition to this direct evidence, some further inferences can be made from what is said in Seven Against Thebes, especially in the choral song 720–91.

Since we know of no other murder but that of Laius to which fr. 122a could reasonably be taken to refer in a play that bore his name, we can safely assume that Laius' death (off stage, of course) was the main event of the first play. Since he was killed while on a journey (fr. 387a), he must have been given some reason for leaving Thebes. In Euripides' Phoenician Maidens (35–7) he is on his way to Delphi, and this version was not a new one, since Sophocles in Oedipus the King seems to presuppose it; but Aeschylus cannot have used it, since he makes Laius head southwards – towards Plataea, beyond which lie Megara and Corinth. We know that the exposure of Laius' infant son was mentioned in the play (fr. 122) and so probably had some relevance to its plot: in Euripides, Laius went to Delphi to ask whether his son was still alive, and perhaps in Aeschylus the motive for his journey was the same, but he was making for Corinth, having maybe heard a rumour that his son had been rescued and taken there. Meanwhile that son was himself on the way from Corinth to Thebes; we do not know the reason for his journey, and we cannot be sure that Aeschylus

troubled to provide him with one. And they met at Potniae.

Since Laius contained a reference to Laius' killer tasting his blood (fr. 122a), it is more likely than not that there was a full narrative of his murder – in other words, that the messenger-speech from which fr. 387a comes belonged to this play rather than to the next. The news will have triggered lamentations, in the midst of which the body of Laius was probably brought back – much as in Seven the bodies of the two brothers are brought back from the battlefield at 848 after the Chorus have already begun singing laments for them.

According to Apollonius Rhodius (Argonautica 4.475–9), the tasting and spitting of a murder victim's blood was particularly associated with treacherous killings such as the ambush-murder (as Apollonius tells it) of Medea's brother Apsyrtus; and the same source that tells us that Aeschylus mentioned this custom in Laius tells us that he mentioned it also in The Perrhaebian Women, a play whose central event was the exceptionally treacherous murder by Ixion of his father-in-law. If Laius' killer was indeed said to have tasted his blood, the murder must have been presented very differently from any other version known to us – unless, as we hear retrospectively in Sophocles (Oedipus the King 118–23, 836–50), the survivor's tale of the murder was in crucial respects false (doubtless to exonerate himself for having failed to protect his master), and he pretended that Laius had been ambushed by a gang of brigands.

It is not likely that either the arrival of Oedipus at Thebes, or the menace of the Sphinx from which he saved the city (Seven 775–7), featured in Laius, since they provided the main plot features of the satyr drama The Sphinx (see below).

387a On our journey we were approaching the junction of three wagon tracks where the road forks, where we were passing the meeting of the three ways at Potniae.

From an account by a survivor of Laius' last journey.

2. OEDIPUS

With the possible exception of fr. 387a (see above) and maybe of fr. 236 (see below), nothing survives of the text of this play. There are, however,

several passages in *Seven Against Thebes* which seem to presuppose that the audience have been informed about certain previous events, notably the curse of Oedipus and its motivation, and a dream that Eteocles had about the division of his father's property (*Seven* 710–11; cf. 727–33); It is also possible that when Sophocles – particularly in the earliest of his three Theban plays, *Antigone* – alludes to an episode of the story in a way that presupposes previous knowledge of it, he is assuming that his audience will fill in the gaps by recalling the fairly recent, and famous, production by Aeschylus.

From the Chorus of Seven (778–90) we hear the following account of the curse of Oedipus and what led up to it:

*But when he became aware,
wretched man, of his appalling marriage,
enraged by grief,
with maddened heart,
he perpetrated two evils:
by his own father-slaying hand
he was robbed of his < > eyes,*

*and, angered with his sons
for their wretched maintenance of him, he let fly at them
(ah, ah!) the curses of a bitter tongue,
that they would actually one day
divide his property between them
with iron-wielding hand.*

The statement that Oedipus perpetrated 'two [literally "twin"] evils' when he learned the truth about his marriage (and, presumably, learned more or less at the same time that he had killed his father) suggests that in Aeschylus' imagining of the story, the discovery and the self-blinding were followed quite closely by Oedipus' curse on his sons. Moreover, Eteocles' dream, in which apparently a 'Scythian stranger' cast lots between the brothers (*Seven* 727–33; cf. 816–19, 906–9, 941–50), ought to precede the curse: coming at that stage, the dream would be enigmatic and ambiguous; coming after the curse it would tell Eteocles nothing that he had not been told already. This tends to suggest that dream, discovery, self-blinding and curse, probably in that sequence, all formed part of Oedipus, though the dream, like that of the Queen in *The Persians* or of Clytaemestra in *The Libation-Bearers*, will most likely have taken place shortly before the action of the play began. We may add that if Oedipus was angry with his sons 'for their wretched maintenance of him', he must already have been an old man who had 'retired' from active life and

entrusted the management of his household and city to his sons; and they were failing to treat him with proper filial respect, even at a time when his reputation was still unblemished. We cannot tell how the discovery was effected, and we have no way of knowing what role, if any, Oedipus' mother-wife played in the action.

If this outline reconstruction of Oedipus is correct, it leaves little if any space in the play for events subsequent to Oedipus' curse. Rather, the death of Oedipus, the quarrel between Eteocles and Polyneices, the expulsion of the latter from Thebes, his arrival at Argos and the raising of Adrastus' expedition against Thebes must all be taken to fall in the undramatized interval between the actions of Oedipus and of Seven.

3. SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

4. THE SPHINX

The subject of this satyr drama will have been the defeat of the Sphinx by Oedipus, who must surely be the 'stranger' of fr. 235. A contemporary vase painting (the Fujita Hydria) probably throws light on the role of the satyrs in the play: it shows five of them, white-bearded, richly robed and carrying long sceptres, sitting on high-backed, cloth-draped chairs looking at, and apparently listening to, the Sphinx seated on a rock. They seem to have usurped the role of Theban councillors, perhaps in the hope of securing the reward offered by Creon to whoever should solve the Sphinx's riddle and so save the Thebans from destruction; they will have failed to do so, and perhaps found themselves in danger of making a meal for the Sphinx, until rescued by Oedipus. A few other, later vase paintings also bring satyrs and the Sphinx together, but there is no particular reason to associate them specifically with Aeschylus' play (the overcoming of a monster was a common theme of satyr drama).

235 And for the stranger a garland,¹ the ancient < mark of honour (?)>, the best of bonds according to the tale of Prometheus.²

236³

The Sphinx, the bitch⁴ that presided over days of ill-fortune *From a*

choral song.

THE SUPPLIANTS

Preface to *The Suppliants*

It has long been universally accepted that *The Suppliants* was part of a sequence of plays that also contained *The Danaids*, which likewise had the daughters of Danaus as its Chorus and which, as fr. 43 showed (see pp. 154–5), presented a later stage of their story, being set on the day after their marriage to their cousins, the sons of Aegyptus, and the murder of all but one of the bridegrooms by their unwilling brides. The other play of the tragic trilogy has almost always been identified as *The Egyptians*; whether it preceded or followed *The Suppliants* was, and is, disputed (see pp. 152–4). The satyr drama that wound up the production, if (as was normal) it dealt with another section of the same myth, had to be *Amymone*, whose title character was one of the Danaids, but until 1952 it was not known for certain whether *Amymone* was a satyr drama at all.

Until 1952, also, it was generally taken as all but certain that *The Suppliants* was the earliest of Aeschylus' surviving plays and therefore the oldest known European drama: the active role of the Chorus, the dominance of song (more than half the text is sung or chanted), the apparent presence of two singing subsidiary choruses (Egyptians in 825–65, Argive soldiers or the Danaids' maidservants in 1034–61), the scant use made of the second actor, and the simplicity and slightness of the plot all seemed to point in that direction.

In 1952, *Oxyrhynchus Papyrus* 2256 was published. One of its many fragments (fr. 3) comes from a headnote ('*Hypothesis*') giving information about the result of the City Dionysia tragic competition in a particular year (we cannot identify the year for sure). In this year, Aeschylus was victorious with a production that included, as its third and fourth plays, *The Danaids* and the satyr drama *Amymone*; Sophocles was second, and one Mesatus was third. Mesatus' name was followed by a series of play titles, some of which are enclosed in brackets in the papyrus; the likeliest explanation is that these

bracketed titles belong to Sophocles (the brackets indicating that they are out of place) and the remainder to Mesatus.

Now, unless we resort to some desperate suppositions,¹ this evidence proves that the Danaid tetralogy was written to be performed at a festival at which Sophocles was also competing. Sophocles won his first victory in 468;² according to Plutarch³ this was the first time he had competed, but another source (the chronicle of Eusebius) says he first came before the public in the second year of the 77th Olympiad – which would mean the City Dionysia of 470 – and Plutarch, or his source, is under considerable suspicion of having improved the story to make Sophocles' defeat of the established master Aeschylus a more sensational event. We can say, then, that the Danaid plays were almost certainly produced between 470 and 459 inclusive, but probably *not* in the last few years of this period in view of the absence from the setting of *Suppliants* of any house, cave etc. which could be represented by a *skene*.⁴ The date is often given as 463 because the name of that year's *archon* (chief magistrate), Archedemides, matches the scanty remnants of the date rubric on the papyrus; but so does the word *archon* itself, which in year-dates sometimes precedes the *archon*'s name, sometimes follows it and sometimes is omitted altogether.

The story of the Danaids exists in dozens of variants.⁵ Their common core is that a quarrel between the brothers Danaus and Aegyptus, great-grandsons of Zeus and of Io of Argos, leads to Danaus and his fifty daughters⁶ fleeing from Egypt to Argos, their ancestral home, pursued by their cousins, the fifty sons of Aegyptus (in many accounts accompanied by Aegyptus himself), who desired to take the Danaids in marriage regardless of their wishes or their father's. The conflict is seemingly resolved when Danaus agrees to the marriages taking place, but he secretly supplies weapons to his daughters, and all but one of them kill their bridegrooms on the wedding night. The survivor, Lynceus, in many versions seeks and gains revenge upon Danaus; at any rate, he and his wife, Hypermestra, regularly become the founders of a new royal line of Argos and the ancestors of such heroes as Perseus and Heracles. Hypermestra's sisters are in some versions punished (sometimes eternally), while in others new husbands are found for them.

Of the three plays in the Aeschylean corpus that are surviving fragments of closely connected suites of dramas, *The Suppliants* is the

one that has suffered most by the loss of its companion plays. It only covers one small section of the Danaid story – the arrival and reception of the Danaids and their father at Argos, and the Argive refusal of a demand for their surrender, resulting in a declaration of war by the Herald speaking in the name of the sons of Aegyptus; its references to earlier events are scanty and vague (we are told far more about Io than we ever are about the past history of Danaus, his brother and their families), and while some things said in *The Suppliants* are clearly designed to foreshadow the coming mass murder,⁷ hardly any further information about Aeschylus' treatment of the later part of the story can be safely inferred from the text of the surviving play. We are fortunate, at least, to have part of a speech of Aphrodite from the third play (fr. 44), which clearly harks back to the warning given to the Danaids by the Secondary Chorus⁸ in *The Suppliants* (1034–42) that they should not slight her power.

The scantiness of our evidence for the rest of the trilogy has made it hard to resolve certain important issues in the interpretation of *The Suppliants* itself. Two that are particularly crucial – and related to each other – are the motivation of the Danaids and their father, and the extent to which we are being invited to sympathize with their position and plight.

It is obvious that the Danaids are determined not to accept marriage to their cousins, and obvious too that the cousins deserve most if not all of the invective that is flung at them in the play; the words and actions of the Aegyptiads' representatives (the Herald and the Egyptians accompanying him) leave it in no doubt that they regard the Danaids as their property – in effect, as runaway slaves – and are likely to treat them as such,⁹ just as the Danaids themselves had feared (335). No Greek would have accepted this equation of marriage with slavery, and no Greek would have tolerated anyone claiming the right to take his daughter as a wife without his consent.¹⁰ But the Danaids' words throughout leave it less than entirely clear whether they are simply seeking to avoid being forcibly claimed in marriage by these particular unwelcome suitors, or whether their aim is actually to avoid marriage altogether. The latter objective would seem to any Greek male bizarre and anti-social; the only women Greeks had heard of who lived in that way were the Amazons (cf. 287), the mythical enemies of Heracles, Theseus and Greek civilization generally.

Which is it? The answer is given, I think, by the emphasis placed, at crucial moments in the trilogy, on the power of Aphrodite, and by the clear implication of the words of the Secondary Chorus, at the end of

The Suppliants, that the Danaids are slighting her. Now it is in no way a slight to Aphrodite for a woman, or her father, to reject a disagreeable suitor, much less one who displays as much arrogance, insolence and violence as the Aegyptiads do. But it is most certainly an offence against her if a woman, or a man for that matter, rejects absolutely all relationships with the opposite sex; it is precisely for that offence that Aphrodite engineers the destruction of Hippolytus in Euripides' play of that name. That, therefore, is the Secondary Chorus' perception of the Danaids' attitude – and the Danaids, when they respond (1052–73), give no indication that it was a mistaken perception. That permanent virginity is indeed the Danaids' aim is also indicated by the implication of Danaus' speech shortly before (996–1013) that it was to avoid the effects of Aphrodite's power that the family had fled from Egypt, and by the Danaids' invocations of the virgin goddess Artemis both near the beginning of the play (144–53) and near its end (1030–31); relevant too, no doubt, is their great fondness for reminding Zeus of the unusual reproductive technique which he used to beget Epaphus (17–18, 40–47, 170–71, 535, 574–89, 592, 1064–7). And it appears that Danaus not only has no objection to this determination of his daughters, but has actually inspired it; just before they go into Argos he reminds them, with what many have found unnecessary insistence, of the importance of their preserving their chastity, and at the outset they describe themselves as the pawns on his gameboard (11ff.).

It is hardly surprising that the Danaids avoid making all this clear to the Argives – at least until they have ensured that Argos is firmly committed to support them even at the cost of war with Egypt. The Argives are willing to take on that grave risk because of the greater danger of offending the gods if they refuse; they might well not have been willing had they been aware that they were aiding and abetting a serious offence against Aphrodite (and against the Greek way of life). What is surprising is that it is not made clear *to the audience* before the Argives appear; even towards the end of the play, where the evidence is stronger, the matter is not made explicit. This has some weight as an argument in support of the view that *The Suppliants* was the second play of the trilogy, not the first as usually supposed; if Danaus' intentions and motives were made clear in a preceding play (which would have to be *The Egyptians*), the audience would not need to have them spelt out again. (On the question of what those motives may have been, see pp. [153–4](#).)

To any Greek it was the duty of every father to see to it that his

daughters were given to appropriate husbands, and a father who neglected this duty, let alone one who deliberately kept his daughters unmarried for selfish reasons – as Acrisius did with his daughter Danaë, or Aegisthus with his stepdaughter Electra – was a social criminal.¹¹ At the same time, many spectators will have wondered what *they* would have done if they had been told by an oracle (as Danaus may have been; see pp. 153–4) that they would be killed by a son-in-law. As for Danaus’ daughters, the audience will probably have regarded them as innocent parties, obeying their father either because they were given no choice or because they assumed, as every decent son or daughter was expected to assume, that their father was always right. In *The Suppliants*, Danaus at first stays very much in the background, putting forward his daughters – much more likely to win compassion – as the seekers of asylum and protection. Against such men as the sons of Aegyptus, they fully deserve it.

Many attempts have been made to find contemporary political relevance in the Danaid trilogy, but in view of our uncertainty as to its precise date none of them can be regarded as compelling. It is, however, worth recording that *The Suppliants* contains the earliest evidence for the existence of the word *dēmokratia* ‘democracy’: the word itself does not appear in the play, but thinly disguised equivalents are found in two passages.¹²

NOTES

1. Such as that the ‘Hypothesis’ refers to a posthumous production, or that the tetralogy was not produced until many years after it was written.
2. *Parian Marble (Fragmente der griechischen Historiker* [Jacoby] 239 A 56); Plutarch, *Cimon* 8.8–9.
3. *Cimon* 8.8.
4. The years 468 (when Sophocles was victorious) and 467 (the date of the Theban tetralogy) are also excluded.
5. Set out in full by H. Friis Johansen and E. W. Whittle in the introduction to their edition (Copenhagen 1980), pp. 40–55; see also T. R. Gantz, *Early Greek Myth* (Baltimore 1993), pp. 198–208.
6. When *The Suppliants* was thought to be a very early play, it was often suggested that its Chorus actually numbered fifty. There was never any justification for this. If in a Euripidean play of the 420s (coincidentally of the same name) a conventional tragic Chorus of

fifteen can represent a group who are repeatedly described as the mothers of the *Seven* against Thebes (Euripides, *Suppliants* 12–13, 100–102 etc.) and even as ‘seven mothers of seven sons’ (*ibid.* 963–4), it cannot seriously be doubted that several decades earlier it would have been possible for a conventional Chorus of (as it then was) twelve to represent a group of fifty.

7. For example, the reference to the Danaids’ suppliant-boughs as *enchiridia* (21), literally ‘things held in the hand’ but in ordinary usage ‘daggers’; or their father’s injunction to them to ‘value... chastity more than life itself’ (1013), not specifying *whose* life they should value less.
8. Assumed in this translation to consist of the Argive soldiers assigned by King Pelasgus to escort the Danaids into the city; for other views see note on 1034.
9. *Suppliants* 838–40, 918; see also notes on 873 and 920.
10. The woman’s own consent was in principle not required, though it is striking that in our play (940–41) King Pelasgus says that the Herald, on behalf of the Aegyptiads, may take the Danaids provided that *they* (not their father) are willing, that the Secondary Chorus name Desire and Persuasion as the daughters and assistants of Aphrodite (1038–40), and that Aphrodite herself in *The Danaids* (fr. 44.1–2) lays stress on the *mutual* desire of the primal couple Heaven and Earth. It should be added that the question of endogamy versus exogamy, sometimes thought to be at issue in this trilogy, is entirely irrelevant; marriage between cousins, and indeed between even closer relatives (uncle and niece, half-brother and half-sister), was very common at Athens, was often regarded as the option of choice, and in some circumstances (where a father died leaving a daughter or daughters but no son) could actually be compulsory (the daughter had to marry the closest relative who claimed her).
11. Though, so far as we know, there was no way to compel him legally to take action, or punish him legally if he did not.
12. *Suppliants* 604 (*dēmou kratousa cheir* ‘the people’s sovereign vote’) and 699 (*to damion, to ptolin kratunei* ‘the people, which rules the city’); see V. Ehrenberg, ‘Origins of Democracy’, *Historia* 1 (1950), p. 522.

Characters

CHORUS *of the daughters of Danaus*

DANAUS, *the fugitive ex-king of Egypt*

PELASGUS, *king of Argos*

SECONDARY CHORUS OF EGYPTIANS

Egyptian HERALD

SECONDARY CHORUS OF ARGIVE SOLDIERS

[Scene: The sea-coast near Argos. A mound represents a shrine (with altars) to the major gods of the city. One side-passage is imagined as leading to the city, the other to the sea. Enter CHORUS from the seaward direction. They are followed by DANAUS, who goes to the shrine and keeps a lookout towards the city.]

CHORUS:

May Zeus, god of suppliants, look
graciously upon
our band, which set forth by ship
from the fine sands at the mouth
of the Nile. We have left the land of
Zeus,¹
which borders on Syria, as fugitives,
not through public banishment for
bloodshed
after condemnation by state decree
but of our own accord, in flight from
men,
~~and~~horring marriage with the sons of
Aegyptus
and their impious <thoughts>.
Danaus, our father, the originator of
our plan,
the leader of our band,² surveying the
situation like a gameboard,³
ordained this as the most honourable
of painful options,
to flee headlong over the waves of the
sea
and put in to the land of Argos, from
whence
originates our race, which claims to
derive
from the touch and breath of Zeus
on the gadfly-driven heifer.⁴
So to what more friendly land
~~than~~²⁰this could we come
with these hand-held emblems⁵ of the

suppliant,
 these wool-wreathed olive branches?
 <O ancestral gods of Argos>
 to whom belong the city, the land and
 its clear waters –
 Both the gods above, and the chthonic
 gods
 inhabiting their highly honoured
 abodes,
 and, thirdly, Zeus the Saviour,⁶
 protector of the houses
 of pious men – receive as suppliants
 this female band, and may the country
 show them
 a spirit of respect. As for the
 numerous,
 wanton male swarm of the sons of
 Aegyptus,
 before they set foot on this marshy
 shore, send them to the open sea,
 them and their swift-oared vessel; and
 there may they meet
 the battering of storm and squall,
 thunder and lightning,
 and the rain-bearing winds
 of the savage sea, and perish,
 before ever mounting the beds from
 which Right bars them,
 appropriating us, who belong to their
 father's brother,
 against our wills!

Now let me invoke
 the calf of Zeus, the vindicator⁷
 from beyond the sea, the child
 of our ancestress the flower-browsing
 cow, conceived by a breath,
 the fruit of Zeus' touch⁸ – and the
 destined time
⁴⁵appropriately fulfilled
 the name derived from that touch,⁹
 and she gave birth to Epaphus;

and now, by making mention of him

here in the ancient grazing-grounds
of his mother, and recalling
her long-past sufferings, I shall now
produce
reliable proof, which, unexpected as it
is, the land's
⁵⁵inhabitants will find clear;
it will be recognized, once explained
at length.

If there happens to be any native
nearby
skilled in augury who hears my
lament,
he⁶⁰ will think he is hearing a voice like
that
of Tereus' wife, whose cunning
schemes brought her misery,¹⁰
the nightingale whom the hawk
pursues,

who, shut off from her green river-
banks,
utters a grieving lament for her
familiar haunts
and sings the story of her son's death,
how he perished
by her own kindred hand,
experiencing her unmotherly anger.¹¹

So I too, fond of lamenting in Ionian
strains,¹²
re⁷⁰nd my soft, sun-baked cheek
and my heart unused to tears;
I cull the flowers of grief,
in apprehension whether these
friendless exiles
fr⁷⁵om the Land of Mists¹³
have any protector here.

O ancestral gods, hear us with favour,
and see where justice lies:
b⁸⁰y not giving our youth to be
possessed in marriage against what

is proper,
by showing you truly hate outrageous
behaviour,
you will act justly < > .
Even for distressed fugitives from war
an altar is a defence against harm
that gods respect.¹⁴

May Zeus make all be well in very
truth!
The desire of Zeus is not easy to hunt
out:
the paths of his mind
stretch tangled and shadowy,
impossible to perceive or see clearly.

It falls safe, not on its back,¹⁵
when an action is definitively
ordained by the nod of Zeus.
It blazes everywhere,
even in darkness, with black fortune
for mortal folk.

He casts humans down
from lofty, towering hopes to utter
destruction,
without deploying any armed force.
Everything gods do is done without
toil:
he sits still and nevertheless somehow
carries out his will directly
from his holy abode.¹⁶

Let him look on this human
act of outrage, on the kind of youthful
stock that is sprouting:¹⁷
the prospect of marriage with me
makes it bloom
with determination hard to dissuade;
it has frenzied thoughts
that goad it on implacably,
having had its mind transformed < to
love a ruinous delusion > .

Such are the sad sufferings that I
speak and cry of,
grievous, keening, tear-falling
sufferings –
iē, iē! – made conspicuous by loud
laments:

I honour myself with dirges while I
still live.

I appeal for the favour of the hilly
land of Apia¹⁸ –
you understand well, O land, my
barbaric speech¹⁹ –

¹²⁰⁻²¹and I repeatedly fall upon my
Sidonian²⁰ veil,
tearing its linen to rags.²¹

But unclean rites,²² even when things
are going well, are vulnerable
to divine intervention – so long as
death keeps away.²³

Iō, iō, iō, troubles hard to gauge!
Where will these waves carry us?
I appeal for the favour of the hilly
land of Apia –

¹³⁰you understand well, O land, my
barbaric speech –
and I repeatedly fall upon my
Sidonian veil,
tearing its linen to rags.

¹⁴⁻⁵The oar blade and the flax-sewn house
of wood²⁴ that keeps out the sea
have brought me here without storms
and with good winds, and I have no
complaint;

¹³⁸⁻⁴⁰now may the all-seeing Father
in time bring about
a propitious end,
so that the offspring of a most august
mother²⁵
may escape the beds of men – ah, ah!
–
unwedded and unsubdued.

May the chaste daughter of Zeus²⁶
likewise watch over me, with a
willingness matching mine,²⁷
she who dwells behind august, secure
temple façades:²⁸ with all her might,
aggrieved by the pursuit,
¹⁴⁵⁻¹⁶⁰ let her, the Untamed One,
become the rescuer of us, the untamed
ones,²⁹
so that the offspring of a most august
mother
may escape the beds of men – ah, ah!
—
unwedded and unsubdued.

And if not, this dark-skinned,
¹⁶⁵ stiff-beaten race
will supplicate the underworld Zeus,
the ever-hospitable Zeus of the
departed,³⁰
¹⁵⁰⁻¹⁶⁰ in death, with nooses
instead of olive branches,
if we have not secured the aid of the
Olympian gods.
Ah, Zeus! *Íō*, the divine wrath
that hunted Io! I know the jealousy
of¹⁶⁵ the wife of heaven-conquering
Zeus:
after a stiff wind a storm will come.³¹

And then will not Zeus be liable
to merited censure
for¹⁷⁰ dishonouring the child of the cow,
whom
he himself once begot and caused to
be,
by now turning his face away
when we pray to him?
May¹⁷⁵ he hear us with favour from on
high when we call!

DANAUS: Children, you must show
good sense. This trusty old man,

your father, with whom you have reached this place, has been a sensible ship-master; now I have likewise taken thought regarding the situation on land, and I advise you to

¹⁸⁰record my words on the tablets of your mind and keep them safe. I can see a dust cloud, the voiceless harbinger of an army; the sockets of wheels are not silent as the axles drive them round; and now I see a mass of men bearing shields

¹⁸⁴⁻⁵and spears, together with horses and curve-fronted chariots. Perhaps the ruler of this land <and his followers may be coming> to us <to> view for themselves <what is happening here>, after getting word from messengers. But whether he has set out on this mission with no harmful intent or whetted with raw anger, it is best from every point of view, girls, to

¹⁹⁰sit at this rock sacred to the Assembled Gods:³² an altar is an unbreakable shield, stronger than a city wall. But come as quickly as you can; hold reverently in your left hands³³ your white-wreathed suppliant-branches, sacred emblems of Zeus

¹⁹⁴⁻⁵the enforcer of respect,³⁴ and answer the natives in words that display respect, sorrow and need, as it is proper for aliens to do, explaining clearly this flight of yours which is not due to bloodshed. Let your speech, in the first place, not be accompanied by arrogance, and let it emerge from your disciplined faces and your calm eyes that you are free of

wantonness. And be neither forward nor sluggish in speech: the people here are very ready to take offence. Remember to be yielding – you are a needy foreign refugee: bold speech does not suit those in a weak position.

CHORUS: Father, you speak sensibly to sensible listeners. I shall

²⁰⁶take care to remember this good advice of yours. May our ancestor Zeus watch over us!

²¹⁰ DANAUS: May he do so indeed, with kindly eye!

²⁰⁸ CHORUS: I would like now to take my seat close to you.

²⁰⁷ DANAUS: Then do not delay; and may our stratagem be successful!

[The CHORUS move close to the shrine.]

²⁰⁹ CHORUS: Zeus, look on us and pity us before we perish!

²¹¹ DANAUS: If he is willing, all this will end well. Now call also on this bird of Zeus.³⁵

CHORUS: We call upon the rays of the Sun, which bring salvation.

DANAUS: And holy Apollo, the god exiled from heaven.³⁶

²¹⁵ CHORUS: Knowing what such a fate is like, he will sympathize with mortal exiles.

DANAUS: May he indeed do so, and may he stand by us as a willing helper.

CHORUS: Who else of these divinities should I call upon?

DANAUS: I see this trident, symbol of a god.³⁷

CHORUS: He gave us a good voyage; may he give us a good reception in this land.

²²⁰ DANAUS: This other one is Hermes, according to the Greeks' usage.³⁸

CHORUS: May we receive
proclamations of good news from
him³⁹ in freedom.

DANAUS: Now honour this common
altar of all the Lords, and sit in this
holy place like a flock of doves in
fearful flight from

²²⁵hawks, their fellow-birds, hostile
kindred who defile their race. How
could a bird eat of another bird
and not be polluted? How could a
man marry the unwilling daughter
of an unwilling father and not
become unclean? After doing such
a thing he will surely not escape
the punishment of his folly,
²³⁰even in Hades after death: there
too, so they say, there is another
Zeus who pronounces final
judgement on the dead for their
sins. [*Looking off towards the city,
as if the armed party whose approach
he had announced is now close at
hand.*] Be careful to reply in the
way I spoke of, so that this action
may end well and victoriously for
you.

[*By now the CHORUS are all seated
close to the altar, on which they have
laid some of their suppliant-branches.
PELASGUS enters from the direction of
the city, in a chariot, escorted by
soldiers.*]

-6 PELASGUS: From what place does this
company come that I am
addressing, in un-Greek garb,
wearing luxurious barbarian robes
and headbands? The dress of these
women is not from the Argive
region, nor from any place in
Greece. And how

²³⁸⁻⁴⁰you dared to come to this land so
fearlessly, under the protection

neither of heralds nor of native
sponsors,⁴⁰ and without guides –
that is astonishing. And yet
suppliant-branches are lying beside
you, before the Assembled Gods, in
accordance with our customs: only
in that respect would ‘Greece’ be a
reasonable guess.⁴¹ About other
things, too, it would be proper to
make many more conjectures, if
there were not a

²⁴⁵person here with a voice to explain
to me.

CHORUS: What you have said about
our attire is perfectly true; but how
should I address *you* – as a private
individual, or a temple warden
carrying a sacred staff, or the
leader of the city?⁴²

²⁵⁰ PELASGUS: So far as that is concerned,
you can answer and speak to me
with confidence. I am Pelasgus,
ruler of this city, son of earth-born
Palaechthon; and this land is
cultivated by the race of the
Pelasgians, appropriately named
after me

^{254–5}their king. I am master of all the
land⁴³ through which flows the
holy Strymon, on the side of the
setting sun,⁴⁴ and I mark as my
boundary the land of the
Paeonians,⁴⁵ and the parts beyond
Pindus near the Perrhaebians,⁴⁶
and the mountains of Dodona;⁴⁷
the limit that cuts it short is the
watery sea. I rule what is on the
hither side of these. The soil
²⁶⁰of this land itself, Apia, received its
name long ago in honour of a
healer. Apis the healer and seer,
son of Apollo, came from the land
of Naupactus across the sea⁴⁸ and
cleansed

this land of the man-destroying
creatures which the angry earth,
stained by the pollution of old
bloodshed, had sent up from
below, a hostile horde of serpents
sharing our home. From these Apis
effected, beyond all cavil, a
decisive, liberating

²⁷⁰cure for the Argive land and in
return won as his reward the right
to be remembered in prayers. Now
you have the evidence from me,
you can declare what race you are
of, and tell me more. However, our
city does not love long speeches.⁴⁹

—6 CHORUS: Our statement is brief and
clear. We declare that we are
Argive by race, the offspring of the
cow that bore a fine child; and to
show that this is true, we will add
proofs to what we have said.

PELASGUS: What you say, strangers, is
unbelievable for me to hear, that
this group of yours is of Argive
descent. You

^{279–80}bear more resemblance to the
women of Libya – certainly not to
those of this country. The Nile too
might nurture such a crop; and a
similar stamp is struck upon the
dies of Cyprian womanhood by
male artificers.⁵⁰ I hear too that

^{284–6}there are nomad women in India,
near neighbours to the
Ethiopians,⁵¹ who saddle their way
across country on camels that run
like horses; and then the man-
shunning, meat-eating Amazons –
if you were equipped with bows,
I'd be very inclined to guess that
you were them. If you explain to
me, I

²⁹⁰may understand better how your
birth and descent can be Argive.

CHORUS: They say that once upon a time a certain Io was keyholder⁵² of the temple of Hera in this land of Argos.

PELASGUS: She certainly was; that is the general and dominant tradition.

295 CHORUS: Is there perhaps also a story about Zeus making love to a mortal?

PELASGUS: Yes, and their embraces did not remain concealed from Hera.

CHORUS: <Two of my arrows have already hit the mark.>

PELASGUS: How, then, did this quarrel between the royal pair⁵³ end?

CHORUS: The Argive goddess turned the woman into a cow.

300 PELASGUS: So did Zeus couple again with this cow with the beautiful horns?

CHORUS: They say he did, mounting her in the shape and likeness of a bull.

PELASGUS: And what did the powerful consort of Zeus do in response to that?

CHORUS: She set over the cow a watchman who could see everything.⁵⁴

PELASGUS: Who is this all-seeing lone cowherd you speak of?

305 CHORUS: Argus, child of Earth, whom Hermes slew.

PELASGUS: What else, then, did she contrive against the unfortunate cow?

CHORUS: <She sent a winged> cattle-driver.

PELASGUS: <Do you mean> the gadfly that forces <cattle> to keep moving?

808 CHORUS: Those who dwell near the Nile call it *oistros*.⁵⁵

810 PELASGUS: This too that you have said matches my information perfectly.

811 CHORUS: And in fact she came to Canobus and Memphis.⁵⁶

809 PELASGUS: Is *that* where it drove her to, in her long flight from this land?

813 CHORUS: Yes, and Zeus the Toucher begot a child for her by the touch of his hand.

PELASGUS: So what does the cow's Zeus-begotten calf claim to be called?

815 CHORUS: Epaphus, rightly named after her deliverance.

PELASGUS: <And who was Epaphus' child? >

CHORUS: Libya, who reaped the fruits of a vast <portion> of land.⁵⁷

PELASGUS: Well, who else do you now name as *her* offspring?

CHORUS: Belus, who had two children and was the father of my father here.

820 PELASGUS: Now tell me *his* wise and apt name.

CHORUS: Danaus; and he has a brother with fifty sons.

PELASGUS: Do not begrudge revealing his name too.

CHORUS: Aegyptus. Now you know my ancient lineage, you can act so as to accept the supplication of this Argive band.

825 PELASGUS: You seem to me to have an ancient stake in this land. But what made you bring yourselves to leave your father's home? What misfortune fell upon you?

CHORUS: Lord of the Pelasgians, human sufferings are ever-changing, and wherever you look

you will never see trouble

³³⁰showing the same face. Who ever
supposed that I would take to
flight like this, against all
expectation, and land at Argos,
rejecting with disgust a marriage
tie with my close kindred through
loathing of the marital bed?

PELASGUS: Why do you say you are
supplicating me in the name of
these Assembled Gods, holding
these fresh-plucked, white-
wreathed boughs?

³³⁵ CHORUS: So that I may not become a
slave to the sons of Aegyptus.

PELASGUS: Is this because of hatred,
or are you talking about something
wrongful?⁵⁸

CHORUS: Who would love someone
whom she was buying as an
owner?⁵⁹

PELASGUS: That is how people
increase their strength.⁶⁰

CHORUS: Yes, and when they fall into
misfortune they're easily got rid
of.⁶¹

³⁴⁰ PELASGUS: Well then, how can I act
piously towards you?

CHORUS: By not giving us back into
the hands of Aegyptus' sons when
they demand us.

PELASGUS: That's a hard thing you're
asking – to provoke an outbreak of
war.

CHORUS: But Justice stands by those
who fight for her.

PELASGUS: She will, *if* she was a
partner in your cause from the
beginning.

³⁴⁵ CHORUS: Respect the poop of the ship
of state, garlanded as it is.⁶²

PELASGUS: I shudder to see this divine
abode in shadow:⁶³ the wrath of
Zeus, god of suppliants, is certainly

heavy.

CHORUS:

Son of Palaechthon, hear me
with a gracious heart, lord of the
Pelasgians.

³⁵⁰See me, the suppliant, the wandering
fugitive,
like a heifer chased by a wolf up
the steep rocks, where,
trusting to their protection, she lows
loudly,
letting the herdsman know of her
peril.

-5 PELASGUS: I see this company, shaded
by fresh-plucked boughs,
supplicating in the name of these
Assembled Gods. May the business
of these citizen-strangers⁶⁴ not
prove ruinous, and may this event,
never expected or planned for, not
bring strife to the community: the
city doesn't need that!

CHORUS:

³⁵⁰May the Right that protects
suppliants, servant⁶⁵ of Zeus
Klarios,⁶⁶
indeed see that our flight does not
prove ruinous!
But, old and wise as you are, learn
from one later born:
if you respect one who turns to you
for succour, you will not
<ever have a life of> want:
the gods are disposed to accept the
offerings
of a man pure of stain.

³⁶⁵PELASGUS: You are not sitting at the
hearth of *my* house.⁶⁷ if the city as
a whole is threatened with
pollution, it must be the concern of
the people as a whole to work out
a cure. I cannot make a binding

promise beforehand, but only after making this matter known to the whole citizen body.

CHORUS:

³⁷⁰*You* are the city, I tell you, *you* are the people!
A head of state, not subject to judgement,
you control the altar, the hearth of the city,
by your vote and nod alone;
³⁷⁴⁻⁵With your sceptre alone, on your throne, you determine every matter. Guard against pollution!

PELASGUS: As for pollution, may it befall my enemies! But I

cannot aid you without causing harm;
yet it is also not wise to disregard these prayers. I am at a loss – fear grips my mind
–³⁸⁰Whether to act, or not to act and to take my chances.

CHORUS:

Look out for him who looks down from above,
the guardian of toil-worn mortals who sit to supplicate others
and do not get the justice that custom dictates.
³⁸⁵The wrath of Zeus, god of suppliants, is enduring
and not to be placated by the laments of its victim.

PELASGUS: If the sons of Aegyptus have power over you by the law of your state, saying they are your nearest kin,⁶⁸ who would be willing to oppose that claim? You must plead your

³⁹⁰case, you see, under the laws of your home country, to show that they have no authority over you.

CHORUS:

May I never in any way become
subject
to the power of males! To avoid
a hateful marriage, I am prepared to
flee
right up to the stars! Choose Justice as
your ally,
make the judgement that the gods
approve.

400 PELASGUS: The judgement is not easy
to judge: don't choose me to judge
it. I have already said I am not
prepared to do this without the
people's approval, even though I
have the power, lest (if something
not too good should happen) the
people may end by saying, 'By
giving privileges to foreigners you
destroyed our city.'

CHORUS:

Zeus, god of kindred, watches over
these things
in both directions, ready to lean either
way, appropriately assigning
to the wicked their wrongs, to the
law-abiding their acts of piety.
If these things are weighed fairly, how
could you come to regret it
if you do what is right?

PELASGUS: Deep thought is certainly
needed to save us: the eye, like
that of a diver, must scan right to
the bottom – a clear-sighted eye,
not one unduly fogged by wine –
so that

410 this matter may in the first place
not prove ruinous to the city and
may also end well for me myself,
and that neither may Battle seize
her booty⁶⁹ nor may we, by
surrendering you after you have

thus established yourselves in this
abode
414–15 of the gods, cause a vexatious
lodger to dwell with us, the god of
Vengeance, whose devastating
power does not leave free even the
dead in Hades. Does it not indeed
seem that thought is needed to
save us?

CHORUS:

Think, and become wholeheartedly
our pious sponsor:⁷⁰
420 do not betray the fugitive
who comes from afar, set in motion
by an impious expulsion,⁷¹

and do not look on while I am seized
as plunder
from this abode of so many gods,
425 you who hold all power in this land!
Recognize the men's outrageous
behaviour,
and guard against wrath.

Do not tolerate seeing the suppliant
430 dragged away from the divine images,
in defiance of justice,
by the headband, like a horse,
and grabbed by my richly woven
robes.

434–5 Know this: whichever decision you
make
will hereafter affect your children and
your house: matching justice
must be paid in full.
Ponder that. Justice prevails by the
will of Zeus.

PELASGUS: I have indeed pondered,
and this is where my thoughts
have run aground. There is
absolutely no way to

439–40 avoid provoking a great war, either

against these or against those.⁷²

The ship has been bolted together,
and only restraining cables, one
might say, are keeping it at the
shore;⁷³

⁴⁴³⁻⁵nowhere is there an outcome free
from pain. Even goods < taken >
from a ransacked house can
< eventually > be < replaced > , by
the grace of Zeus, god of
possessions, by other goods in
excess of what was lost, and he can
replenish its stores; and a tongue
that has loosed off words that are
out of season – painful darts that
stir anger – well, speech can
soothe the hurt speech has caused.
But to ensure that kindred

⁴⁵⁰blood shall not be spilt,⁷⁴ one
should make ample offerings, and
many victims should fall in
sacrifice to many gods to avert
such a scourge. I declare I have
completely stepped aside from this
dispute; I would rather be ignorant
than knowledgeable about these
troubles. May all be well – but that
is not my expectation.

⁵⁵ CHORUS: Listen to the conclusion of
my many respectful words.

PELASGUS: I am listening. Speak on; it
will not escape me.

CHORUS: We have girdles and belts to
hold our robes together.

PELASGUS: I suppose that is
appropriate for women to have.

CHORUS: Well, these, I tell you, give
us a fine method –

⁶⁰ PELASGUS: Say what words these are
that you are going to utter.

CHORUS: If you don't make a promise
to our band that we can rely on –

PELASGUS: What is your girdle-method

meant to achieve?

CHORUS: To adorn these images with
votive tablets of a novel kind.

PELASGUS: Those words are a riddle.
Speak plainly.

165 CHORUS: With all speed – to hang
ourselves from these gods.

PELASGUS: I hear words that flay my
heart.

CHORUS: You understand! I have
opened your eyes to see more
clearly.

PELASGUS: Truly this business is hard
to wrestle with, in all sorts of
ways; a host of troubles is coming
at me like a river

470 in spate. This is a bottomless sea of
ruin, certainly not easily crossable,
that I have stepped into, and
nowhere is there a safe haven from
trouble. If I do not perform this
thing for

474–5 you, you have threatened me with
a pollution terrible beyond
compare;⁷⁵ if, on the other hand, I
take my stand in front of the walls
and try the issue of battle with
your kinsmen the sons of
Aegyptus, it will indeed be a bitter
loss that the ground should be
stained with men's blood on
account of women. All the same,
there is no alternative but to
respect the wrath of Zeus, god of
suppliants; the fear of him is the
480 greatest fear a mortal can have.
You now, aged father of these
maidens, < approach the altar, >
quickly take these boughs in your
arms, and place them on the other
altars of our native gods, so that all
the citizens may see the evidence
of this

485 supplication, and no hostile words

be thrown out against me – for the people are very inclined to criticize their rulers. Perhaps those who see them will take pity and detest the outrageous behaviour of that band of males, and the people be more friendly towards you. Everyone has kindly feelings for the underdog. [DANAUS, *with the boughs from the altar in his arms, descends from the mound.*]

90 DANAUS: We value this very highly, to have secured a respectful, <beneficent> sponsor. But please send with me some attendants

493–5 and guides from among the natives, so that we can find the altars in front of the temples of the gods who dwell in the city and their < > abodes, and so that we may be safe as we walk through the city. Our form and appearance are not at all similar: the Nile does not breed a race resembling that of the Inachus.⁷⁶ Take care, in case confidence gives birth to fear.⁷⁷ People have been known to kill a friend through ignorance.⁷⁸

0 PELASGUS: Go, men: what the stranger says is right. Take him to the city altars and the abodes of the gods. And you must not be talkative with those you meet while escorting this man who took sanctuary at the gods' hearth.⁷⁹

[DANAUS *departs for the city, escorted by some of the soldiers.*]

505 CHORUS: You have spoken to him; he has had his instructions and is on his way. But what shall I do? How will you give me reason to be confident?

PELASGUS: Leave the branches here as

a symbol of your distress.

CHORUS [*laying their boughs on the altar*]: Look, I am leaving them, obedient to your words.

PELASGUS: Now move down to this level meadow.⁸⁰

CHORUS: And how can an unconsecrated meadow protect me?

10 PELASGUS: We will not surrender you to be plundered by those birds of prey.

CHORUS: But what if they are more hostile than malignant serpents?

PELASGUS: May you speak good words when good words are spoken to you!⁸¹

CHORUS: It's not surprising if my mind is distraught with fear.

PELASGUS: <Women> are always unreasonably frightened.

15 CHORUS: Well then, put heart into us by word and action.

PELASGUS: You won't be deprived of your father for long. I am <going> to call the people of this country to assembly, so that I can make the public friendly towards you; and I shall

520 instruct your father what he should say. In view of that, stay here and appeal in prayer to the gods of the country to gain what you desire. I will go to put these plans into action: may persuasion, and the fortune of success, go with me! [*He departs for the city, accompanied by his men. The CHORUS descend from the mound.*]

CHORUS:

O King of Kings, O most blest
of the blest, O power most perfect
725 of the perfect, Zeus giver of

prosperity,
listen to us, and in thorough loathing
of those vicious men keep them away
from your descendants:
cast into the purple-coloured sea
the black ship on whose thwarts sits
our ruin!

Look favourably on the woman's point
of view,
and renew the tale told long ago
of your kindness to the woman you
loved,
the ancestress of our race.
Toucher of Io, remember it all!
We claim to be of the race of Zeus,
springing from an inhabitant of this
land.

I have come and halted on the old
tracks,
the place where my mother was
watched⁸² as she browsed on the
flowers,
the cattle-pasture meadow, from
whence Io,
driven by the gadfly,
fled in frenzy,
passing through many tribes
of men; and < > she cleaved⁵⁴⁻⁶
the waves of the strait, in accordance
with destiny, and thus defined the
boundary
of the land on its distant side;⁸³

and she rushed through the land of
Asia,
from end to end of sheep-rearing
Phrygia,
and passed through the Mysian city of
Teuthras⁸⁴
up the vales of Lydia⁵⁵⁰
and through the mountains of Cilicia,
speeding across the land of the

Pamphylians,⁸⁵
its ever-flowing rivers
and its deep, rich soil, and the land
of Aphrodite⁸⁶ abundant in wheat.

And she arrived, while the winged
cowherd
was still piercing her with its sting,
in the plain of Zeus,⁸⁷ rich in all kinds
of pasture,
the snow-fed meads⁸⁸ over which
flows
the might of the Nile
and the water untouched by the
plagues of Typhos,⁸⁹
maddened by undeserved sufferings
and agonies inflicted by the hurtful
sting,
a maenad of Hera.⁹⁰

And the men who then dwelt in that
land
felt their hearts leap with green fear⁹¹
at the unaccustomed sight,
beholding a half-human beast that
their minds could not handle,
with some features of a cow
and some of a woman, and the
monstrosity astounded them.
And who then was it who applied a
healing charm
to her who had wandered so far in
misery,
the gadfly-tormented Io?

It was he who rules for his eternal
lifetime,
<⁵⁷⁹Zeus, who restrained her with his
hand > .⁹²
By the force of his painless strength
and by his divine breath
she was stopped,⁹³ and in tears she
wept away
the grief of her shame.

And, receiving what can truly be
called a Zeus-given burden,
she bore a perfect child,

destined to unbroken good fortune
through his long lifetime.

And so the whole land cried,

‘Truly this is the offspring

580 of Zeus, the begetter of life!’

Who else could have put a stop
to the sufferings caused by Hera’s
plotting?

It was the act of Zeus. And if you say
that our race

springs from Epaphus, you will hit the
mark.

590 What god could I appropriately call
on account of actions that give me a
juster claim?

The Lord and Father himself, with his
own hand, was my engenderer,
the great, wise, ancient artificer of my
race,

the all-resourceful one, Zeus who
grants fair winds.⁹⁴

185 He does not speed at the bidding of
another,

exercising power inferior to some
mightier lord:

there is no one seated above him
whose power he reveres,

and he can hasten the deed as fast
as the word. What of all this can the
mind of Zeus not bring to pass?

[DANAUS *returns from the city.*]

600 DANAUS: Take courage, children: all is
well so far as the natives are
concerned. A most decisive decree
has been passed by the people.

CHORUS: Welcome, old father; you
bring me splendid news. Tell us

what the final decision is that has been reached, and in what direction the majority of the people's sovereign vote went.

605 DANAUS: The Argives have resolved, with no divided voice,⁹⁵ but in such a way that my aged heart felt young again – for the air bristled with their aptly named right hands⁹⁶ as the entire people ratified this proposal – that we shall have the

610 right of residence in this land in freedom, with asylum and protection from seizure by any person; that no one, whether inhabitant or foreigner, may lay hands upon us; and that if force be applied, whoever among these citizens fails to come to our aid shall lose his civic rights and be driven into exile

615 from the community. The king of the Pelasgians persuaded them to make this decision by delivering a speech about us, in which he declared how great could be the wrath of Zeus, god of suppliants, who might at a future time bring it heavily to bear against the city, and saying that the double pollution, in relation both to foreigners and to citizens,⁹⁷ which the city

620 would be bringing into being, would be an irremediable breeder of grief. Hearing this, the Argive people resolved, without waiting to be called,⁹⁸ that the motion should be carried. The Pelasgian people had heard and obeyed the guidance of the orator, and Zeus had brought about the decisive outcome.

[DANAUS goes up to the shrine and
again begins to keep a lookout, this
time towards the sea.]

CHORUS:

⁶³⁵ Come now, let us utter prayers of
blessing
for the Argives, in return for their
good deed;
and may Zeus, god of strangers, watch
over
the words of our foreign lips as we
honour them for putting an end
to our wandering, <so that we speak
in a manner no one will censure>.

⁶³⁹ Now <come>, you gods
of the family of Zeus, pray hear me
as I pour forth my wishes for my kin:⁹⁹
⁶⁴²⁻⁶ never may lustful Ares, insatiable of
appetite for the cries of battle,
who reaps harvests of men in fields
that are not arable,¹⁰⁰
cause this Pelasgian land to be wasted
by fire –
because they took pity on us
and cast a kindly vote,
and because they respect the
suppliants of Zeus,
this pitiable flock;

nor did they cast their vote
with the males, and so spurn
the struggle of the women –
they heeded Zeus' avenger,¹⁰¹ ever on
the watch,
⁶⁴⁹⁻⁵⁰ hard to combat; what house would be
pleased
to have him on its roof? where he
perches, he brings grievous doom –
for they revere their kinsfolk
who were suppliants of holy Zeus;
⁶⁵¹⁻⁵ therefore they will be propitiating the
gods
at pure altars.

So from our shaded lips¹⁰²
let words of prayer fly
with love and honour.
⁶⁵⁹Never may plague empty
this city of men,
nor may <war> bloody
the soil of the land with its fallen
natives;
may the flower of its youth
not be plucked, and may Aphrodite's
⁶⁶⁵man-destroying bedfellow Ares
not mow down their finest.

And for their elders
may the sacred hearths where they
gather¹⁰³
teem <with offerings>:
⁶⁷⁰may the city be well governed,
because they honour great Zeus –
most especially in his capacity as god
of strangers –
Zeus who guides destiny aright
according to age-old law.
⁶⁷⁵We pray that there may always be
born
new guardians of the land,
and that Artemis Hecate¹⁰⁴
may watch over the women giving
birth.

And may no man-slaying
destruction¹⁰⁵
⁶⁸⁰come upon this city and ravage it,
arming Ares the breeder of tears, with
whom is no dance and no lyre,
and intestine violence in the
community.
⁶⁸⁵And may the cheerless flock of
sicknesses
perch far from the citizens' heads,
and may the Wolf god¹⁰⁶ be kind
to all their young men.

And may Zeus make the land bring
crops to perfection,
bearing them in every season;
may the best of their grazing flocks
bear many young;¹⁰⁷
may they, through the gods' grace,
thrive in every way.
⁶⁴And may their singers make
auspicious music at their altars,
and let there rise from pure lips
a voice in amity with the lyre.

And may the people, which rules the
city,
protect well the citizens' privileges,¹⁰⁸
⁷⁰a government acting with craft and
foresight for the common good;
and to foreigners may they offer
painless justice under fair
agreements¹⁰⁹
before arming the god of war.

⁷⁴And may those who dwell in the land
always honour its native gods
with ancestral rites, carrying laurel
boughs and sacrificing oxen;
for the honouring of parents
is written third
in the statutes of Justice the highly
honoured.¹¹⁰

¹⁰ DANAUS: I praise you, dear daughters,
for these wise prayers. Now do not
be afraid when you hear from your
father this unexpected and
untoward news. From this lookout
post, which received you as
suppliants, I can see the boat. It is

⁷¹unmistakable. I cannot fail to
observe the ship's sailing gear,¹¹¹
its side-screens,¹¹² and the prow
that scans the way ahead with
eyes,¹¹³ obeying all too well the
guiding helm at the very stern of

the ship, as if unfriendly to us; and
the men

⁷²⁰on board the ship are
conspicuously visible, their black
limbs set against white garments.
Now the other ships and all the
assisting forces are plain to see,
and the leading vessel herself is
close inshore, has furled her sail
and is rowing in with all

⁷²⁴⁻⁵oars. Now you must look at this
matter in a calm and disciplined
way, and not forget these gods.¹¹⁴ I
will come back with helpers and
defenders, since perhaps some
herald or embassy may come here,
wanting to seize their booty and
take you away. Nothing will come
of that – don't be afraid

⁷³⁰of them; but all the same it's best,
in case we should be slow in
calling for help, at all costs never
to forget your protection here.¹¹⁵
Have courage: sooner or later, you
know, on the destined day, any
mortal who shows contempt for
the gods will pay the penalty.

⁷³⁵ CHORUS: Father, I'm afraid, because
the swift-winged ships

have come, and there is hardly any
time remaining.

Terrified fear grips me: has my fleeing
so great a distance really done me any
good?

Father, I am beside myself with fright!

⁷⁴⁰ DANAUS: Take courage, children;
remember, the vote of the Argives
was decisive. They will fight for
you, I know it for sure.

CHORUS: The crazed family of
Aegyptus are abominable, their
appetite for battle insatiable. And I
am speaking to one who knows

that.

With timber-built, black-eyed ships
they have sailed here in wrathful
haste,
with a great black army!

DANAUS: Well, they'll find plenty of
men here whose arms have been
made good and leathery by the
midday heat!

CHORUS: Don't leave me alone, I beg
you, Father! A woman on her own
is nothing: there is no fight in her.

They're murderous, full of cunning
deceit;
in their impure minds, like ravens,
they care nothing for the sanctity of
altars.¹¹⁶

DANAUS: That would be very helpful
to us, children, if they should make
enemies of the gods as well as you.

6 CHORUS: Father, they certainly won't
keep their hands off us for fear of
these tridents or the awesomeness
of the gods.

They're so arrogant, maddened
by their unholy rage, as shameless as
dogs,
turning a deaf ear to the gods.

760 DANAUS: Well, rumour has it that
wolves¹¹⁷ are stronger than dogs;
and papyrus fruit¹¹⁸ can't beat ears
of corn.

CHORUS: Their tempers are like those
of wanton, impious beasts: we
must take care they do not get
control of us!

765 DANAUS: You can't send out a naval
expedition quickly, and you can't
bring one in quickly either. Nor is
it a speedy job running stern cables
ashore to keep the ship safe,¹¹⁹ and

their custodians don't immediately
feel secure when they've dropped
anchor, especially when they've
come to a harbourless coast as the
sun is departing and night
approaching

⁷⁷⁰– night tends to breed travail in
the mind of an expert helmsman.
So even to land an army¹²⁰ would
not be a good idea until the fleet
was secure in its anchorage. But as
you're afraid, be sure not to forget
the gods; <I will come back from
town as soon as possible,> having
secured assistance. The
⁷⁷⁵city will find no fault with a
messenger who is old in years but
young in his eloquent intellect.
[DANAUS *departs for the city.*]

CHORUS:

O hilly land that we rightly revere,¹²¹
what is going to happen to us? Where
in the land of Apia
can we flee in the hope that there is
somewhere a dark hiding place?
O to become black smoke
⁷⁸⁰up among the clouds of Zeus,
to fly up without wings, invisible,
imperceptible,
like dust, and end my existence
altogether!

The evil will no longer be escapable;
⁷⁸⁵my heart within is shaken, its flesh
turned black.¹²²
My father's lookout has trapped me – I
am perishing with terror!
I would wish to meet my fate
in a plaited noose
⁷⁹⁰before an abominated man could
touch this flesh!
Before that, may I die and Hades
become my lord!

Where can I find a seat in the sky,
near where the moist clouds turn into
snow,
or a slippery crag, where no goat
climbs,
lonely, overhanging, impossible to
point out,¹²³
the haunt of vultures, which could
testify
to my long fall,
before, against the determination of
my heart,
I meet a killer marriage?

⁸⁰⁰ ⁷⁹⁹ Thereafter, I do not refuse to become
prey for the dogs, a dinner for the
native birds:
for he who dies is freed
from evils that cry to be bewailed.
Let death come and get me
before the marriage bed does!
⁸⁰⁶ What path of escape can I yet cleave
that will release me from wedlock?

Raise a crying voice, send words of
prayer
to heaven, to the gods and goddesses –
but how can they be fulfilled for me?
< > ¹²⁴ Look on us, Father,
viewing violence with unfriendly eyes,
as is right: respect
⁸¹⁵ your suppliants, almighty Zeus,
possessor of the earth!

For the offspring of Aegyptus <are
advancing on us,>
intolerable in their male wantonness!
⁸¹⁹ ⁸¹⁸ Puffed, but they run after me in pursuit
and in their clamorous lust
seek to seize me by force.
The beam of the balance¹²⁵ is yours,
all yours:
what in mortals' destinies is decided

without you?

[A band of EGYPTIANS rushes in, led by a HERALD. The text of the one manuscript is badly defective, but the EGYPTIANS' first utterance appears to be a cry of triumph – 'ho ho ho, ha ha ha!' (825) – on finding their prey; from the following lines there survive the words 'I am the seizer' (826), 'on the ship' (826a) and 'on the land' (826b), after which there was probably another line in which they declared their intention of taking the Danaids to their ship. The CHORUS reply, 'Before that, seizer, may you wear away – yugh!' ¹²⁶ (827). Of their next line (828) there survive two letters which may be part of the word for 'eye' and, after a gap, the phrase 'going down straight away'; possibly they are telling the Egyptians to get out of their sight and go straight back down to their ship. They then (829) say something which the ancient commentator interprets as 'No longer as having heard from my father, but seeing with my own eyes, I shout'; what remains of the line in the manuscript suggests that it began with 'now', and its end can be plausibly restored as 'with knowledge I raise a cry'. The next line (830) is syntactically incoherent but must mean something like 'I see this is a prelude to violent sufferings'. From here, although the text remains very corrupt until 902, it becomes possible again to offer some sort of continuous translation.]

CHORUS:

Aaah-eh! Aaah-eh!
Go, fly to protection!

[*They flee to the shrine.*]
<These> grim-hearted <beasts>
are showing their wantonness,
intolerable at sea or on land!
Lord of the land,⁸³⁵¹²⁷ array yourself in
our defence!

EGYPTIANS:

Off, off, to boat, fast as your feet!
[*On receiving no response.*] Then won't,
then won't you have hair torn, hair
torn, and tattoos,
⁸⁴⁰very bloody gory chopping off head?
¹²⁸
Off, off, to barge,¹²⁹ damn you!

CHORUS:

If only, in the many eddies
of the briny sea you voyaged over,
⁸⁴⁵together with your arrogant masters
and your bolt-bound timbers,¹³⁰ you
had perished!

EGYPTIANS:

You'll be running with blood when I
seat you on the barge.
Want a thump, do you? You must be
off.
I tell you, give over your shouting;
<quench>
⁸⁵⁰your longing – it's a mental sickness.
< >
Leave where you're sitting, go to the
ship,
you who are not respected in a city of
pious men!¹³¹

CHORUS:

May you never again see
⁸⁵⁵the water that rears cattle,¹³²
the water that causes the blood that
propagates life¹³³
to increase and flourish in men.

EGYPTIANS:

I am a warrior of long pedigree,
⁸⁶⁰possessor of powerful hands.
You will quickly board the ship, the

ship,
willing or unwilling!
Force compels much. <Your hopes >
are gone.
⁸⁶⁴Go, <you damnable, helpless
wretches
of girls with broad girdles! >

CHORUS:

Ah, ah!
I wish you perish helplessly,
across the flowing expanse of the salty
sea,
⁸⁷⁰drifting before the winds blowing
from Syria
on to the piled sands of Sarpedon's
bank!¹³⁴

⁸⁸² HERALD: I order you to go with all
speed to the curved boat;

⁸⁸⁴let no one make any delay, or you
will be dragged by the hair
without the least scruple.

CHORUS:

⁸⁹⁶Off, oh!
I wish you would be uttering your
insults beneath the earth!
<Your desire is > swelling
<with great vanity >. May great
Destiny avert the monstrous
outrage
⁸⁹⁹that you are committing!¹³⁵

⁸⁷² HERALD: Cry and howl and call on
gods – you won't jump out

⁸⁷⁵of the Egyptian boat.¹³⁶ You'll soon
be uttering an even bitterer song of
anguish.

[*The HERALD and his men begin to
advance steadily towards the shrine.*]

CHORUS:

⁹⁰⁵Off, oh, Father, the protection of your
image
is failing me! He is taking me by force

to the sea,
coming step by step, like a spider –
a dream, a black dream!
Ototototoi!
Mother Earth, Mother Earth, avert
the fearsome <assailant>!
O Father Zeus, child of Earth!¹³⁷

HERALD: I do not fear the divinities of
this country. They did not rear me
to manhood, nor will it be by their
nurture that I reach old age.

CHORUS:

He¹³⁵ is raging close to me, the two-
footed snake;
like a viper he <stares at> me.
What noxious beast <do I see
before me? I am in the grip of>
agony.
Ototototoi!
Mother Earth, Mother Earth, avert
the fearsome <assailant>!
O Father Zeus, child of Earth!

HERALD: If you don't accept your fate
and go to the ship, your finely
worked clothes will be ripped
without mercy.

*[The HERALD and his men approach
closer still.]*

CHORUS *[calling out in the direction of
the city]:*

Help¹³⁸, noble leaders of the city, I'm
being overpowered!¹³⁸

¹³⁹ HERALD: It looks as though I'll be
dragging you off by the hair, since
you aren't hearing my orders very
sharply.

CHORUS:

We¹³⁹ are done for! My lord,¹³⁹ we're
being treated unspeakably!

¹⁴⁰ HERALD: You'll soon be seeing plenty
of lords – the sons of Aegyptus.

Don't worry, you won't be
complaining about a lack of
authority!

[Enter PELASGUS, from the city, with
armed men.]

11 PELASGUS: Here, you, what are you
doing? What's your idea in
insulting this land of Pelasgian
men? Do you really think you've
come to a city of women? For a
barbarian you are

915 showing an unduly arrogant
attitude towards Greeks; you have
made a great mistake, and your
mind has gone far astray.

HERALD: In what respect have I erred
in doing this, or acted without
right?

PELASGUS: In the first place, you do
not know how an alien should
behave.

HERALD: What do you mean? I am
finding and taking my own lost
property.

PELASGUS: What local sponsor have
you spoken to?¹⁴⁰

20 HERALD: To the greatest of all
sponsors – Hermes the Searcher.¹⁴¹

PELASGUS: You may have spoken to a
god, but you show no respect for
the gods.

HERALD: I honour the gods who live
by the Nile.

PELASGUS: And those of this land are
nothing – that's what I'm hearing
from you.

HERALD: I shall take these women,
unless someone formally asserts
they are free.

25 PELASGUS: If you should lay a finger
on them, you'll howl – and soon.

HERALD: I hear what you say; it's far
from hospitable.

PELASGUS: I don't extend hospitality
to those who rob the gods.

HERALD: I shall go and report this to
the sons of Aegyptus.

PELASGUS: That does not cause my
mind any concern.

930 HERALD: Well, so that I can speak to
them with more definite
knowledge – for it is right that a
herald should bring back a full and
clear report – when I go back
without this band of women who
are their close cousins, by whom
and by what

934–6 right should I say I was deprived of
possession of them? Ares will be
the judge of this matter, and not
on the basis of witnesses' evidence;
he does not settle quarrels by a
payment of silver – no, before that
many men must fall to the ground
and end their lives in convulsions.

PELASGUS: Why need I tell you my
name? You will learn it and know
it in time, you and your fellow-
travellers. You may

940–5 take these women so long as they
consent with friendly heart, if
pious words of yours should
persuade them; < but you may not
take them against their will > .
That is the unanimous vote that
has been passed and enacted by
the people of the city, never to
surrender this band of women by
force. This decision

944–5 has been nailed down with a nail
that has pierced right through, so
that it stays fixed. These words are
not written on tablets, nor sealed
up in a folded sheet of papyrus:
you hear them plainly from the
lips and tongue of a free man. Now
get out of my sight at once.

50 HERALD: You take pleasure in
provoking an outbreak of war. May
victory and mastery go to the
males!

PELASGUS [*as the HERALD and his men
depart*]: Well, I tell you, you'll find
that the inhabitants of this land are
masculine

954-5 all right – they don't drink
barleycorn brew!¹⁴² [*To the
CHORUS:*] Now, all of you, take
courage and go, with a friendly
escort, to our well-fortified city,
enclosed by high,
957, 959 well-crafted walls. There is plenty
of public housing, where
960-6 you can live in well-prepared
accommodation with many others;
or, if it pleases you better, you
may also live in
958 separate dwellings,¹⁴³ since I
myself too am housed on no
962 mean scale. Choose from these
options whatever is best and
965 pleases you most. I am your
patron,¹⁴⁴ as are all the citizens
who have made and enacted this
decree. Why need you wait for
anyone with more authority than
these?

CHORUS:

In return for these blessings may you
teem with blessings,
glorious leader of the Pelasgians!
But be so kind as to send here
our father, Danaus, feeling
confident,¹⁴⁵ to take forethought
and form a plan. He should first
871 consider wisely where we should
reside
875 so as to be well reputed, and spoken
of
878 without anger, by the native

population:
even if a country is friendly, everyone
is ready to speak ill
of people of alien language.¹⁴⁶ May all
be for the best!

[PELASGUS *departs for the city with
some of his men, leaving the
remainder to guard and escort the
Danaids. The transmitted text here
continues:*]

⁸⁷⁷Arrange yourselves, dear maids, in the
way
in which Danaus allotted you to each
of us
⁸⁷⁹as a dowry in the form of a servant.

*There is, however, no other clear
evidence in the text for the existence
of these maidservants: they can
hardly have only just come on stage
(where could they have been
before?), and, had they been with
their mistresses from the start, one
would have expected some notice to
be taken of them, especially by
Pelagus. Moreover, Pelagus is still
apparently being addressed in 973–4
and can hardly leave the scene before
then, and it would be clumsy (and
unparalleled) to have Danaus arrive
from the same direction almost
immediately afterwards. It is
therefore likely that the maids, and
the three lines addressed to them,
were added to the play by a later
producer, perhaps in place of a short
choral song. The CHORUS probably
descended from the mound before
singing the song.]*

[Enter DANAUS *from the city, with an
armed escort.*]

sacrifice and pour libation to the
Argives as if to the Olympian gods,
for they have unquestionably been
our saviours. They gave a hearing
to my news of what had happened
which was friendly to their

⁹⁸⁵kin¹⁴⁷ and bitter towards your
cousins; and they assigned to me
these spearmen as attendants, so
that I might have an honourable
mark of distinction, and so that I
might not perish unwitnessed by
the surprise stroke of a weapon,
thus loading the country with a
burden it will never cast off,¹⁴⁸
< and so that no one except the
king might have a more

⁹⁸⁹⁻⁹⁰honourable status than me > .

Having received such favour, < it
is right that we > should give them
respect, gratitude < and honour >
from the bottom of our hearts.

Now inscribe this¹⁴⁹ in addition to
the many other pieces of wise
advice from your father that you
have already inscribed: an
unknown group is tested and
proved by time;¹⁵⁰ and in regard to
immigrants,

⁹⁹⁵everyone has an evil tongue ready
to use, and it is rather easy to utter
words of disgust. I urge you not to
put me to shame, having the
youthful beauty that you have
which makes men turn their heads.
Tender fruit is not at all easy to
guard:

¹⁰⁰⁰beasts and men alike devour it, do
they not? In the case of animals,
winged or walking, Cypris
advertises the availability of juicy
fruits before they are ripe,
preventing them < from resisting >
desire; and likewise with the

charms of a maiden

¹⁰⁰⁴⁻⁵fair of form, every passer-by is
vanquished by desire and shoots a
glance of the eye at her that can
melt her heart. Bearing that in
mind, let us not suffer what we
endured long sorrow and ploughed
a long sea-furrow with our keel to
avoid; let us not cause disgrace to
ourselves and pleasure to

¹⁰¹⁰my enemies. We have two kinds of
housing available – one set offered
by Pelasgus, another by the city –
to live in free of rent. That is easy.
Only keep in mind these precepts
of your father's, and value your
chastity more than life itself.

15 CHORUS: In all else may the Olympian
gods give us good fortune – but so
far as my 'fruit' is concerned,
Father, you can have confidence:
unless the gods have decided on
some new plan, I will not deviate
from the track my mind has
followed till now.

Go¹⁵¹ now to the town, glorifying
the blessed lords, the gods,
~~both~~ those of the city and those who
dwell round
the ancient stream of Erasinus.¹⁵²
Accept our song,
you escorts, and let praise enfold this
city
of the Pelasgians; no longer let us
~~sing~~ in honour of the mouths of the
Nile,
but of the rivers that pour their
tranquil waters
through this land, to drink for health
and for fertility, softening the soil of
the land
with their oil-smooth streams.
~~May~~ chaste Artemis watch over

this band in pity, and may Cytherea's
consummation¹⁵³
not come to us by compulsion:
may that prize be won only in Hades!

ARGIVE SOLDIERS:¹⁵⁴

But it is a wise rule not to ignore
Cypris;
~~for~~¹⁰³⁵ she holds power very close to
Zeus, together with Hera,¹⁵⁵
a goddess of cunning wiles
who is honoured for awesome
deeds.¹⁵⁶

Partners and associates with their dear
mother

¹⁰³⁸ ~~are~~¹⁰³⁹ Desire and the charmer
Persuasion,
to whom nothing can be refused,
and also given to Aphrodite as her
portion are Union
and the whispering paths of
lovmaking.

For the fugitives, I foresee and fear
punishments still to come,
dire suffering and bloody wars:
~~why~~¹⁰⁴⁵, why did they¹⁵⁷ get good sailing
in their swift-spiced pursuit?
Whatever is fated, you know, that will
happen –
the great, unfathomable mind of Zeus
cannot be crossed –
~~and~~¹⁰⁵⁰ this outcome, marriage, would be
shared
with many women before you.

CHORUS:

May great Zeus defend me
from marriage with the sons of
Aegyptus!

ARGIVE SOLDIERS:

That would certainly be best¹⁵⁸ –

CHORUS:

~~You~~¹⁰⁵⁵'re trying to cajole the

uncajorable.

ARGIVE SOLDIERS:

And *you* don't know the future.

CHORUS:

How can I be expected to see into the
mind
of Zeus, gazing into its bottomless
depths?

ARGIVE SOLDIERS:

Then make your prayer a moderate
one.

CHORUS:

What are you instructing me is the
right choice?

ARGIVE SOLDIERS:

Not to ask too much of the gods.

CHORUS:

May Lord Zeus deprive us¹⁵⁹
of a hateful marriage to men
who are our foes – he who gave Io
a good release from her sufferings,
restraining her with his healing hand,
making force kindly –

and may he give victory
to women. I am content to have the
better kind
of evil, the two-thirds kind,¹⁶⁰
and that judgement should go with
justice,
according to my prayers,
through divine contrivances that bring
freedom.

[All depart towards the city.]

The Danaid Tetralogy

1. THE SUPPLIANTS or THE EGYPTIANS

2. THE EGYPTIANS or THE SUPPLIANTS

Of the fragment of papyrus that preserves information about the first production of the Danaid tetralogy, the part that would have contained the titles of the first two plays has not been preserved; what does survive tells us only that the third play was The Danaids and that it was followed by the satyr drama Amymone. It is almost universally accepted that in addition to these two and to The Suppliants, the other play in this production was The Egyptians; the Danaid story is intimately bound up with Egypt, and no other Aeschylean tragedy is known to have had any significant connection with that country. But only one word of the play's text survives – the name Zagreus for the underworld god Hades/Pluto; we have no direct information whatever about its content, and as a result it remains in dispute whether The Egyptians preceded or followed The Suppliants.

The majority of scholars have held that The Egyptians was the second play of the production, following The Suppliants. In that case its subject must have been the events leading from the conclusion of the Argive–Egyptian war (in which, it is generally accepted, King Pelasgus must have been killed, with Danaus perhaps being appointed to, or seizing, the vacant throne) to the arrangement and celebration of the marriages between Danaus' daughters and Aegyptus' sons.

*The alternative view, supported by several nineteenth-century scholars and revived in recent times by Wolfgang Rösler and myself (respectively in *Rheinisches Museum* 136 (1993), pp. 1–22 (English version, with postscript, in M. Lloyd, ed., *Oxford Readings in Classical Studies*:*

Aeschylus (Oxford 2007), pp. 174–98) and B. Zimmermann, ed., *Griechisch-römische Komödie und Tragödie* (Stuttgart 1995), pp. 111–23 (see also A. H. Sommerstein, *Aeschylean Tragedy* (Bari 1996), pp. 143–7)), is that *The Egyptians* was the first play of the tetralogy, was set in Egypt (with a chorus of male Egyptians, perhaps elders), and presented the quarrel between Danaus and Aegyptus. The most important, though not the sole, argument in support of this view is that it explains a curious feature of *The Suppliants*. As is shown above (see pp. 112–13), it is possible to infer from various things said in *The Suppliants*, especially towards the end, that the Danaids' objective and desire, supported and apparently inspired by their father, is not merely to avoid marriage with their cousins but to avoid marriage altogether; but this important fact is never made explicit. It is as if it were being assumed that the audience knew it already, though it is certainly not an invariable, let alone a logically necessary, feature of the Danaid myth. Nor is there any explanation within *The Suppliants* of what Danaus' motive might be for a determination that his daughters should remain permanent virgins – a determination which to any ancient Greek would be incomprehensible except in very extraordinary circumstances.

In some other surviving accounts, however, we learn of a story element that would provide such an explanation. Ancient commentators on *Prometheus Bound* (line 853) and on five other passages by various authors speak of an oracle that had told Danaus he would meet his death at the hands of his son-in-law (according to some) or of a son of Aegyptus (according to others). If in Aeschylus' treatment he was told that he would be killed by the bedfellow of one of his daughters, that would be quite sufficient motivation for him to do his best, or his worst, to ensure that none of them ever had one. There is, however, no hint within *The Suppliants* itself of the existence of such an oracle, and since not all versions of the myth contained it, the poet cannot simply have assumed that the audience would take it for granted; therefore it must have been mentioned in a preceding play, which can only have been *The Egyptians*.

The issue remains unsettled. It affects crucially our understanding of the position of Danaus and his daughters in *The Suppliants*, and of the merits of their plea; it makes, however, relatively little difference to our attempts to reconstruct the course of events in the latter part of the trilogy, except that if Aeschylus did have Danaus receive the oracle mentioned in the previous paragraph, that oracle must of course have been fulfilled and Danaus have ultimately met his death through the action of his one surviving son-in-law, Lynceus (as we shall see, there is some indirect evidence that he did indeed perish in *The Danaids*).

3. THE DANAIDS

We know two things about The Danaids, apart from the obvious fact that, very unusually, the Danaids themselves formed the Chorus for the second time in the trilogy. One is that it began on the morning after the fatal weddings: fr. 43, while corrupt, clearly refers to the rising of the sun and to the ceremonial, musical 'awakening' of the bridal couples. The other is that, doubtless later in the play, Aphrodite appeared and made a speech which contained an eloquent affirmation of the universality of mutual sexual desire in nature with particular reference to the primal union of Heaven and Earth (fr. 44) – clearly with a view to vindicating Hypermestra (who had spared the life of her husband, Lynceus), or to condemning Danaus, or both, but certainly also to condemning the sons of Aegyptus, who, in The Suppliants, are represented – by their own Herald as much as by their enemies – as unilaterally demanding the satisfaction of their desires regardless of anyone else's. It would be highly fitting if this were followed up by the marriage of the Danaids other than Hypermestra to new husbands with whom they could form a union as true as that of Heaven and Earth; it is likely too that before the end of this play Danaus had met his death (the phraseology of an ancient note on Suppliants 37 strongly suggests that its author knew that Danaus was put to death later in the trilogy). The rest is speculation. I attempted a reconstruction of the play in Zimmermann, Griechisch-römische Komödie und Tragödie pp. 123–30 (see also Sommerstein, Aeschylean Tragedy, pp. 147–51).

43 And then will come the brilliant light of the sun, and I will graciously awake the bridal couples, enchanting them with song with a choir of youths and maidens.

Presumably from the prologue of the play, spoken by someone unaware of the plot to murder the sons of Aegyptus.

44

APHRODITE: The holy Heaven passionately desires to penetrate the Earth, and passionate desire takes hold of Earth for union with Heaven. Rain falls from the brimming fountains of Heaven and makes Earth conceive, and she brings forth 5 for mortals grazing for their flocks, cereals to sustain their life and the fruit of trees: by the wedlock of the rain she comes to her fulfilment.¹ Of this, I am in part the cause.

4. AMYMONE

The story behind this satyr drama is told, with some variations, by several later mythographers, notably pseudo-Apollodorus (Library 2.1.4) and Hyginus (Fabulae 169a). Amymone, one of the daughters of Danaus, was sent into the Argive countryside to fetch water and there attracted the attention of a satyr (accounts differ as to how this happened) who attempted to rape her. She called for help to Poseidon, who appeared at once, put the satyr to flight and then himself lay with Amymone; afterwards he created the spring of Lerna for her by striking the ground with his trident. In the play there must of course have been a whole chorus of satyrs, and they can have been driven off (if at all) only at the end of the drama; a series of vase paintings from the late fifth and early fourth centuries suggest that at one stage – as we might expect in this genre – Amymone was besieged lustfully by the whole band, but that eventually Poseidon pacified them and the play ended with them joining in celebration of his union with Amymone. Echoes of the preceding tragic trilogy are evident, as Amymone, like her sisters, is placed by her father in a dangerous situation, is threatened with and resists forcible violation by an arrogant, shameless band of males, and is finally joined in an apparently willing union with an honourable suitor who becomes a benefactor of Argos; it may also be significant that in *The Suppliants* (1023–9) the Danaids are made to praise the rivers of Argos as givers of both vegetal and human fertility.

13 It is your fate to be wedded and mine to wed.

Evidently spoken to Amymone, either by Silenus or by Poseidon.

14 And I < >² your powders and perfumes.

Since Amymone would hardly have powdered and perfumed herself when going to fetch water, this is probably Silenus (or the Chorus leader, if the two were not one and the same) commenting on the fragrance of Poseidon, god of the aristocratic pursuit of horsemanship, here evidently presented as a luxurious habitué of symposia.

PROMETHEUS BOUND

Preface to *Prometheus Bound*

In late antiquity and the Middle Ages *Prometheus Bound* was the most read of the Aeschylean plays, and in subsequent centuries it has remained among the most popular; in particular, its portrayal of a god who endures potentially unending torment, for the sake of humanity, from the agents of a tyrannical Zeus, appealed very powerfully to thinkers, authors and artists of the Revolutionary and Romantic periods, notably Goethe, Byron, Shelley, Marx and Nietzsche.¹ From the mid-nineteenth century, however, doubts began to appear about whether the play was in fact his work. Some of these rested on the inadequate basis of supposed inconsistencies between the theology of this play and that of the rest of the Aeschylean corpus, but increasingly attention has been drawn to important features of style and technique in which *Prometheus Bound* (as well as its evident sequel, *Prometheus Unbound*²) differ markedly from the undisputed plays of Aeschylus, and to possible echoes of other texts that were not composed until after his death. The issue remains in dispute, and the play's authenticity continues to find powerful defenders, not least because it was never questioned in antiquity; but at present it would probably be true to say that a majority of scholars would regard it as being by a slightly later hand.³ Martin West's suggestion⁴ that the hand is that of Aeschylus' son Euphorion, passing his own work off as that of his father, is a very tempting one, not least because it gives full value to the play's audacious grandeur of concept, reminiscent of that of the *Oresteia* and quite unlike anything found in Sophocles or Euripides, which surely suggests Aeschylean inspiration even if the detailed technique may not suggest Aeschylean workmanship.

We have no direct information about when the play was produced. Whether by Aeschylus or not, it can hardly be earlier than *The Suppliants*, to which it contains (at line 857) a clear reference; and it cannot be later than about 430, since in (probably) 429 its sequel *Prometheus Unbound* was imitated or parodied in a comedy by

Cratinus. It may be significant that Euphorion won first prize at the City Dionysia of 431, defeating both Sophocles and Euripides.⁵

The story of how Prometheus stole fire from Zeus and gave it to men, and was cruelly punished by the supreme god but ultimately released by Heracles, had been told by Hesiod (*Theogony* 507–616), who combined it with the story of the creation of the first woman. Our play ignores this latter myth⁶ and instead forges links between the Prometheus/fire story and the great narrative of the successive generations of the gods⁷ – how Zeus overthrew his father, Cronus, and how he was himself at risk of being overthrown by a son of his if he did not take great care in choosing mothers for his children. In the *Theogony* (507–10) he is a son of Iapetus, Cronus' brother; in our play he is upgraded to be himself at least a half-brother of Cronus, a son of Gaea (Earth) (209–10) who is in turn identified with the prophetic goddess Themis (*ibid.*; cf. 18). And Themis is able to give Prometheus knowledge – *foreknowledge*, enabling him to live up to the meaning of his name – of crucial developments in the history of the divine world. She tells him that victory in the war between the generations of gods will go to craft, not to force (209–13), thus enabling him, god of craft as he is, to offer his services to both sides, with only the younger gods accepting them. She, presumably, it also is who tells him⁸ the secret which, if he can only keep it safe, gives him ultimate power even over Zeus: the identity of the female who is destined to bear a son mightier than his father, and with whom, therefore, Zeus cannot mate without sealing his own doom. The audience probably know, as soon as they hear the prophecy, that Thetis is meant – and therefore how the confrontation between Prometheus and Zeus will eventually end;⁹ Prometheus knows too, of course, but Zeus does not. In the latter part of the play, Prometheus proclaims the coming fall of Zeus more and more loudly, but nothing will make him reveal who the fatal female is; and his punishment and pain, already greater than anything a mortal can even imagine, is increased even further. He is told that (as in Hesiod¹⁰) Zeus' eagle will come to gnaw at his liver, but only after he has been thrust beneath the earth to remain in darkness for a long period.¹¹ With the implementation of this first part of his intensified punishment, *Prometheus Bound* ends.

The extremely hostile presentation of Zeus in this play has often been thought amazing in its audacity, and has been a significant factor in the play's appeal to revolutionary and iconoclastic minds. Three things should be remembered. Firstly, Greeks were under no obligation to believe that their gods were good; indeed, Greek myth and poetry

were severely criticized by Plato and others for precisely this reason.¹² Secondly, the idea that Zeus in particular was spitefully hostile to mortals for no good reason was one that was enshrined in the poems of the revered Hesiod: in Hesiod's version of the Prometheus story itself (*Theogony* 535–612; compare *Works and Days* 42–105¹³), when Prometheus deceives Zeus over the division of sacrificial meats, Zeus punishes not Prometheus but humanity, by denying them fire, and then when Prometheus steals fire and gives it to men, Zeus punishes them again by creating the first woman. Thirdly, *Prometheus Bound* is only the first part of the drama. Emphasis is laid on the newness of Zeus' rule,¹⁴ and we are reminded that 'everyone is harsh when new to power' (35); but already there are foreshadowings of a future mellowing in Prometheus' prediction of Io's fate (848–9) and of an eventual friendly reconciliation between Zeus and himself (190–92). We know enough about *Prometheus Unbound* to be sure that this indeed happened;¹⁵ and we also know that almost the first event in that play was the entry of a Chorus of Titans – whom therefore Zeus must have released from the depths of Tartarus, where they were confined at the time of Prometheus' binding (219–21). This apparent development in the character of Zeus between earlier and later stages of a story is not unique to the *Prometheus* plays: it is also found in the *Oresteia*, where Zeus at first, with the Furies as his agents, implacably enforces a model of retributive justice under which crime can be punished only by the victim's kin and only by the commission of a further (and usually a worse) crime, and then, against the fierce opposition of the Furies, protects Orestes from automatic retribution (acting through Apollo) and establishes (acting through Athena) a new model of justice in which guilt is judged and punishment administered by a neutral third party (the judicial organs of the *polis*).¹⁶ The hostile presentation of Zeus in *Prometheus Bound* may be unusually sustained, but it is not an inexplicable anomaly.

Prometheus Bound is a play of startling spectacle, whose realization has often been thought to stretch the resources of the Athenian theatre. According to the text, Prometheus is bound to the windswept upper part of a high cliff, overlooking a deep ravine.¹⁷ It is highly likely that the cliff, as in Sophocles' *Philoctetes* or Aristophanes' *Birds*, is represented by the *skene* (while the *orchestra* represents the floor of the ravine), and that Prometheus, like a felon being executed by *apotympnismos*,¹⁸ will be shown *suspended* in his bonds, his feet not touching the stage platform. If he is bound to a board resting on the *skene* door (which is never used during the play itself), then at the very end he can be made, by the sudden opening of the door, to fall into the dark interior of the *skene* – and, in imagination, of the earth.¹⁹

The Chorus and their father, Oceanus, both arrive by an aerial method of transport – or at any rate Prometheus, before the arrival of the Chorus, hears a ‘rustling sound of birds’ and the ‘light beating of wings’ (123–5), while the Chorus say they have come ‘on swift, striving wings’, sped by ‘the swift breezes... in a winged car’ (128–35). They later speak of leaving ‘this swift-moving car and the pure upper air, the pathway of birds’ (278–80), and Oceanus actually points to the ‘swift-winged bird’ he has guided to the scene (286–7; cf. 394–5) and perhaps never dismounts from it.²⁰ It seems most likely that the Chorus are first seen, in a vehicle or vehicles, on the roof of the *skene*,²¹ from which they descend, out of sight, between 283 and 396,²² from which point they take their normal position in the *orchestra*; while Oceanus’ entrance and exit are a clear case for the use of the flying-machine (*mechane*). With the central character totally immobilized for almost the entire duration of the play,²³ and with all but one of the *dramatis personae* being gods,²⁴ this is arguably the most abnormal Greek drama that we possess.

NOTES

1. For a review of the reception of this play in ancient, medieval and modern times, see A. J. Podlecki, *Aeschylus: Prometheus Bound* (Oxford 2005), pp. 41–68.
2. On *Prometheus Unbound*, see pages 199–203 below. *Prometheus the Fire-Bearer*, a title cited in various ancient and medieval sources and often thought since to have been that of the first or third play of a Prometheus trilogy, is more likely to be an alternative (and preferable) title for the satyr drama about Prometheus produced together with *The Persians* in 472 (see pp. 52–4 above).
3. The linguistic, metrical and other technical arguments against the play’s authenticity are fully set out by Mark Griffith, *The Authenticity of Prometheus Bound* (Cambridge 1977); see also M. L. West, *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 99 (1979), pp. 130–48 (reprinted with a postscript in M. Lloyd, ed., *Oxford Readings in Classical Studies: Aeschylus* (Oxford 2007), pp. 359–96), and M. L. West, *Studies in Aeschylus* (Stuttgart 1990), pp. 51–72. The authenticity of the play has been defended by, among others, H. Lloyd-Jones, in *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 101 (2003), pp. 49–72, and A. J. Podlecki, *Aeschylus: Prometheus Bound* (Oxford 2005), pp. 195–200.
4. West, *Studies in Aeschylus*, pp. 67–72.
5. Euripides’ production included the surviving *Medea*.

6. Which seems, however, to have been used by Aeschylus in the satyr drama *Prometheus the Fire-Bearer* (or *Fire-Kindler*); see fr. 207a and 207b of that play on pp. 55–6 above.
7. There is also a side glance at another evidently well-known myth about Prometheus. At 231–6 we are told that he alone resisted, and frustrated, an attempt by Zeus to ‘obliterate the [human] race altogether and create another new one’; this may refer to his role in the Flood story (Hesiod fr. 2; Epicharmus fr. 113–20 Kassel-Austin, from his comedy *Prometheus or Pyrrha*) or to another similar tale.
8. We are never actually told this in this play (though it may have been mentioned in *Prometheus Unbound*, especially if Gaea–Themis was a character there); but in Pindar (*Isthmian* 8.29–51) it was Themis who revealed to the gods that Thetis was destined to bear a son mightier than his father, and in a parallel tale in Hesiod (*Theogony* 886–900) it was Gaea, with Uranus, who advised Zeus to swallow Metis and so prevent her giving birth to ‘a son who should be king of gods and men’.
9. The revelation of the secret will result in Thetis being given in marriage to the mortal Peleus and fulfilling the prophecy by giving birth to Achilles.
10. *Theogony* 523–5.
11. The period is thirteen generations (cf. 773–4), since he meets Heracles not long after his return to the surface. In *Prometheus the Fire-Bearer* (fr. 208a), in contrast, his confinement is said to have lasted thirty thousand years.
12. See especially Plato, *Republic* 377d–383c.
13. The spitefulness of Zeus towards mortals is also a common theme of classical Athenian comedy, as in Aristophanes’ *Peace*, *Birds* and *Wealth*, in all of which Zeus is defeated by the mortal comic hero (with the aid of other gods – including, in *Birds*, Prometheus) and in two of which he is deposed from power.
14. See 149–51, 310, 439, 942, 955, 960.
15. And the original audience knew from the start that it was certain to happen; for they lived in a world in which on the one hand Zeus still ruled, and on the other Prometheus was a recipient of cult.
16. See H. D. F. Kitto, *Form and Meaning in Drama* (London 1956), pp. 66–86; A. H. Sommerstein, *Aeschylean Tragedy* (Bari 1996), pp. 273–88, 383–90.
17. See 4–5, 15, 20, 31, 142, 157, 269–70, 563, 618, 1016–17.
18. This Athenian method of capital punishment involved clamping the criminal by the neck, wrists and ankles to a large board and standing the board up, perhaps against a wall, in such a way that

the condemned man's feet did not reach the ground; he would be left degradingly and agonizingly exposed, with no one permitted to come near him, probably until sunset, when, if still alive, he would be strangled by tightening the neck clamp. Euripides' brother-in-law is subjected to this treatment (for sacrilege) in Aristophanes' play *The Women at the Thesmophoria* (930–1208) until Euripides rescues and releases him. See L. Gernet, *The Anthropology of Ancient Greece* (Baltimore 1981), pp. 252–76 (translation of an article first published in 1924). Prometheus, being immortal, will remain thus not for one day but day and night for an indefinite period (19–34) – though for the actor's benefit a discreet footrest will doubtless have been provided.

19. See note on 1093.

20. He does not mention dismounting or remounting, though his line 'Your words are plainly meant to send me back home' (387) – his first single-line speech in the scene – provide a possible occasion for the latter.

21. See notes on 128 and 140.

22. See note on 283/4.

23. And presumably for most of the following play as well.

24. This feature too, it would seem, was shared by this play with *Prometheus Unbound* – where even the one mortal character, Heracles, is destined to become a god eventually.

Characters

POWER, *servant of Zeus*

VIOLENCE, *servant of Zeus*

hephaestus

prometheus

chorus of daughters of Oceanus

OCEANUS

IO, *daughter of Inachus, loved by Zeus*

HERMES

[Scene: A remote, uninhabited region of Scythia. One of the two side-passages is imagined to lead eventually to Olympus and Greece, the other to further lands at the edge of the world. Enter POWER and VIOLENCE, leading PROMETHEUS prisoner; they are accompanied by HEPHAESTUS, who is carrying his tools.]

POWER: We have reached the land at
the furthest bounds of earth, the
Scythian marches, a wilderness
where no mortals live. Hephaestus,
you must attend to the instructions
the

⁴⁻⁵Father has laid upon you, to bind
this criminal to the high rocky
cliffs in the unbreakable fetters of
adamantine bonds; for it was your
glory, the gleam of fire that makes
all skills attainable, that he stole
and gave to mortals. For such an
¹⁰offence he must assuredly pay his
penalty to the gods, to teach him
that he must accept the autocracy
of Zeus and abandon his human-
loving ways.

HEPHAESTUS: So far as you two are
concerned, Power and Violence,¹
the orders of Zeus have been
completely fulfilled, and there is
no task still lying before you. But
for my part, I

¹⁵can hardly bring myself to take a
kindred god and forcibly bind him
at this stormy ravine; still, I have
no alternative but to endure doing
it, for it is dangerous to slight the
Father's word. [*To PROMETHEUS:*]
God of lofty cunning, son of

¹⁹⁻²⁰Themis² of wise counsel, I, under
as much constraint as you, am

going to nail you, with metal
bonds hard to undo, to this rock,
remote from men. Here you will
hear no mortal voice, see no
mortal form; you will lose the
bloom of your skin, grilled by the
brilliant flames of the sun;
welcome to you will

²⁵be Night of the gaudy apparel
when she hides the daylight, but
welcome too the return of the sun
to disperse the early- morning
frost;³ and you will be continually
worn down by the burden of one
or another kind of suffering, for he
who can relieve it is not yet born.⁴
This is what you have gained from
your human-loving ways. Though
a god, you did not

³⁰tremble before the anger of the
gods, and you gave honours to
mortals beyond what is right; in
punishment for which you will
keep watch on this rock, upright,
without sleep, without bending
your knee,⁵ and will utter many
wailing laments, all in vain. The
mind of Zeus is implacable – and
³⁵everyone is harsh when new to
power.

POWER: Well, then, why are you
waiting and grieving to no
purpose? Why do you not loathe
this god whom the gods hate so
much, who traitorously gave your
most prized possession to mortals?

HEPHAESTUS: Kinship is terribly
powerful, you know, and so is
companionship.⁶

⁴⁰ POWER: I agree; but how is it possible
to disobey the word of the Father?
Are you not more in terror of that?

HEPHAESTUS: You are always pitiless
and full of ruthlessness.

POWER: Because it does no good to lament over this fellow; so don't waste effort when it won't be of any use.

45 HEPHAESTUS: Oh, how I hate my craft skills!

POWER: Why do you hate them? Quite simply, your skills aren't in any way responsible for the task you now have.⁷

HEPHAESTUS: All the same, I wish someone else had been allotted them.

50 POWER: Everything is burdensome, except ruling over the gods: no one is free but Zeus.

HEPHAESTUS: These things [*indicating the bonds he is to fasten on PROMETHEUS*] prove to me that that is so, and I have no way to argue otherwise.

POWER: Well, won't you hurry up and put the bonds on him, so that the Father doesn't look and see you idling?

HEPHAESTUS: Well, you can see that the harness is ready here.⁸

55 POWER: Then put it round his arms and with all the strength at your command strike with your hammer and nail it to the rock.

HEPHAESTUS [*beginning to do so*]: The job is being completed, you see, with no dallying.

POWER: Strike harder, squeeze him, don't leave any slack! He's very clever at finding ways out of impossible situations.

60 HEPHAESTUS: Well, *this* arm is fixed so it can hardly be freed.

62 POWER: Then pin down that other one safely too, so that he'll learn, this intellectual,⁹ that Zeus is cleverer than he is.

- 72 HEPHAESTUS [*as he finishes clamping the arms*]: I've got to do it; you needn't keep ordering me.
- 71 POWER: I most certainly *shall* order you, in fact I'll hound you on. Now put the armpit-bands around his ribcage.
- 63 HEPHAESTUS [*doing so*]: No one could justly find fault with me – except this one here.
- 5 POWER: Now drive the remorseless bite of the adamantine wedge with all your power right through his chest.
- HEPHAESTUS [*as he reluctantly prepares to do so*]: Ah, Prometheus, I groan for your sufferings!
- POWER: Hesitating again, are you? Grieving for the enemies of Zeus? Take care you don't have cause to pity yourself, one of these days!
- HEPHAESTUS [*having fixed the wedge*]: Do you see this sight, hard for eyes to look on?
- 74 POWER: I see this fellow getting what he deserves. Move down, and hoop his legs strongly.
- 75 HEPHAESTUS [*doing so*]: There, the job is done; the work did not take long.
- POWER: Now hammer in the pierced fetters¹⁰ with all your strength; for your work is being assessed by a tough appraiser.¹¹
- HEPHAESTUS: Your tongue tells the same tale as your appearance.
- 80 POWER: *You* be soft if you want, but don't make it into a reproach to *me* that I am implacable and have a harsh temper.
- HEPHAESTUS [*who has finished his work*]:

The trap is around his legs; let us go.
 [*He leaves; POWER and VIOLENCE*]

remain.]

POWER: There now, practise your
impudence here, robbing the gods
of their prerogatives and handing
them over to beings who live for a
day. How are mortals going to be
able to bail

⁸⁵you out of these sufferings? The
gods are wrong to call you
Prometheus, 'the Forethinker'; *you*
now need someone to exercise
forethought for you as to how
you're going to wriggle out of this
piece of handiwork.

[POWER *and* VIOLENCE *depart.*]

⁹⁰ PROMETHEUS: O bright Sky, and you
swift-flying winds, and river-
springs, and you countless
twinkling waves of the sea, and
Earth, mother of all, behold what I,
a god, am suffering at the hands of
the gods!

Look, with what indignities
⁹⁵I am tormented, to endure
these trials for endless years!
Such a degrading bondage has been
invented for me
by the new high commander of the
Blest Ones.

Alas, I groan for my present suffering
and for that which is coming: where
can one fix

^{99, 100}a limit for these sorrows?

But what am I saying? I have
precise foreknowledge of all that
will happen: none of my sufferings
will come as a surprise. I must bear
my destined fate as easily as may
be, knowing

¹⁰⁵that the power of Necessity is
unchallengeable. And yet it is

impossible for me either to keep
silence or to speak about my
fortunes. I am in this
wretchedness, yoked in these
constraining bonds, because I gave
privileges to mortals: I hunted
109–10 for, and stole, a source of fire,
putting it into a fennel stalk,¹² and
it has shown itself to be mortals'
great resource and their teacher of
every skill. Such is the offence for
which I am paying this penalty,
pinned in these bonds under the
open sky.

[*Suddenly*] Hey, what is that?
What sound, what scent has been
wafted to me, unseen,
from gods, from mortals, or from both
together?
Has someone come to this rock at the
end of the world
to be a spectator of my sufferings – or
what do they want?
Behold me, the prisoner, the god in
misery,
the enemy of Zeus, who incurred
the hostility of all the gods
who enter Zeus' courts
through being too friendly to mortals!
Ah, ah, what is this rustling sound of
birds
that I now hear close by? The air is
whistling
with the light beating of wings.
Whatever approaches me makes me
fearful!

[*Enter the CHORUS of nymphs,
daughters of OCEANUS, seated in a
winged vehicle or vehicles.*¹³]

CHORUS:

Have no fear: this is a friendly
company

that has come to this rock
on swift, striving wings, having with
difficulty
persuaded our father to consent.
The swift breezes have borne and sped
me here;
for the sound of stroke on steel
penetrated to the depths
of my cave, and shocked my grave-
faced modesty out of me;
and I hurried here, unshod, in a
winged car.

PROMETHEUS:

Ah me, ah me!
Offspring of prolific Tethys,¹⁴
¹³⁸¹⁴⁰children of Father Oceanus,
who rolls round the whole earth
in tireless flood,
look, see in what bonds
I am pinned
to the topmost cliffs of this ravine
to keep an unenviable watch!

CHORUS:

¹⁴⁵See, Prometheus; and fear brings
rushing into my eyes
a mist full of tears
on seeing you
left here to wither, bound to this rock
by these degrading bonds of adamant.
New rulers wield the helm on
Olympus,
and Zeus rules arbitrarily by new-
made laws;
what once was mighty he now casts
into oblivion.

PROMETHEUS:

Would that he had cast me
below the earth, below Hades who
welcomes the dead,
into boundless Tartarus,
and cruelly fixed me there with
unbreakable chains,
so that no god nor any other being
could gloat over these afflictions!

As it is, I wretchedly endure the
buffeting
of the winds high up, to my enemies'
delight.

CHORUS:

What god is so hard-hearted
as to take delight in this?
Who does not share the distress
of your sufferings – except for Zeus?
He, with constant anger,
making his resolve inflexible,
is conquering the sons of Uranus,¹⁵
nor will he stop
till either he has glutted his desires or
by some contrivance
another takes his power – which is
hard to take.

PROMETHEUS:

I tell you that even though my limbs
are held
in these strong, degrading fetters,
the president of the immortals¹⁶ will
yet have need of me,
to reveal the new plan by which
he can be robbed of his sceptre and
his privileges;
and he will not charm me
by the honey-tongued spells
of persuasion, nor will I ever disclose
it
in terror of harsh menaces,
until he releases me from these savage
bonds
and consents to pay compensation
for this degrading treatment.

CHORUS:

You are audacious and unyielding
in the face of these bitter pains,
and you speak too freely.
A piercing fear agitates my mind,
and I am afraid what may befall you:
where are you ever to reach harbour
and see a limit

164-5 to these sufferings? For the son of
Cronus has a character
that is immovable, a heart that is
inexorable.

PROMETHEUS:

He is harsh, I know, and makes justice
as he pleases; all the same, I fancy,
his mind will one day
be softened, when he is shattered in
the way I spoke of:
one day he will calm his stubborn
wrath
and come into unity and friendship
with me,
as eager for it as I will be.

CHORUS: Tell us everything and reveal
the story: on what accusation did
Zeus arrest you, to abuse you in
such a cruel

195 and degrading way? Explain it to
us, if it doesn't harm you to do so.

PROMETHEUS: It is painful for me even
to speak of these things, but it is
also painful to keep silent: it is
wretched either way. As soon as
the gods began to quarrel and
mutual strife was

200 stirred up among them, some
wishing to depose Cronus from his
throne – so that Zeus could reign,
forsooth! – while those on the
other side were determined that
Zeus should never rule over the
gods, at that time I gave the best
advice to

205 the Titans, the children of Uranus
and Gaea, but could not persuade
them. They despised ingenious
stratagems, and in the pride of
their strength they thought they
could retain control with ease by
brute force. But my mother,
Themis,

also called Gaea – one person under multiple names¹⁷ – had more than once prophesied to me how the future would come to pass, saying that it was destined that the victors should be those who excelled not in might nor in power but in guile.¹⁸

²¹⁵I spoke to them explaining this, but they simply did not see fit even to look at the idea. Well, it then seemed to me the best of the available options to stand beside Zeus in an alliance that both parties welcomed, taking my mother with

^{219–20}me; and by my counsels the black depths of Tartarus’ recesses now cover Cronus of ancient birth together with those who fought beside him. Such are the benefits that the autocrat of the gods has received from me, and this is the evil reward with which he has recompensed me! It seems that this malady

²²⁵is built into autocracy, that of not trusting one’s friends. But as to the question you ask – what is the cause of his thus degrading me – I will now explain it. As soon as he took his seat on his father’s throne, he immediately assigned to the

²³⁰various gods their various privileges,¹⁹ and organized his government; but of those wretched creatures, mortals, he took no account at all – on the contrary, he wanted to obliterate the race altogether and create another new one.

²³⁵And no one resisted that plan except me. I had the courage to do it, and rescued mortals from the

fate of being shattered and going to Hades.²⁰ And that, you see, is why I am being racked by these torments, agonizing to suffer and piteous to

^{239–40}see. I took special pity on mortals but was not held to merit it myself; instead I have been disciplined in this merciless way, a sight to bring disgrace on Zeus.

CHORUS: One would have to be made of stone and have a soul of iron, Prometheus, not to share the distress of your

²⁴⁵affliction. I would not have wished to see it, and now that I have seen it, I am pained to the heart.

PROMETHEUS: Yes, I certainly am pitiable for friends to behold.

CHORUS: You didn't, I suppose, go even further than that?

PROMETHEUS: I did: I stopped mortals foreseeing their death.²¹

CHORUS: What remedy did you find for that affliction?

²⁵⁰PROMETHEUS: I planted blind hopes within them.

CHORUS: That was a great benefit you gave to mortals.

PROMETHEUS: And what is more, I gave them fire.

CHORUS: You mean those short-lived beings now possess flaming fire?

PROMETHEUS: From which they will learn many skills.

²⁵⁵CHORUS: And those are the offences for which Zeus –

PROMETHEUS: Is degrading me and is not relaxing my suffering in the least.

CHORUS: And has no end been set for your trials?

PROMETHEUS: No end at all, other than 'when such be his will'.

CHORUS: And how can it possibly ever
be his will? What hope is there?
Don't you see you were wrong? To
say you were

²⁶⁰wrong is no pleasure to me, and
it's painful for you. Let us leave
that matter: look for some means
of release from your torment.

PROMETHEUS: It's very easy for
someone who is standing safely out
of trouble to advise and rebuke the
one who is *in* trouble.

²⁶⁵I knew all that, all along. I did the
wrong thing intentionally,
intentionally, I won't deny it: by
helping mortals, I brought trouble
on myself. But I certainly never
thought I would

²⁷⁰have a punishment anything like
this, left to wither on these
elevated rocks, my lot cast on this
deserted, neighbourless crag. Now
stop lamenting my present woes:
descend to the ground and hear of
my future fortunes, so that you
will know

²⁷⁵it all to the end. Do as I ask, do as I
ask. Share the suffering of one who
is in trouble now: misery, you
know, wanders everywhere, and
alights on different persons at
different times.

CHORUS:

We receive your call
willingly, Prometheus,
and now with light foot I shall leave
my seat in this swift-moving car
and ²⁸⁰the pure upper air, the pathway
of birds,
and approach this rugged earth below:
I want to hear
the tale of your troubles to the end.

[As the CHORUS are descending,²²

OCEANUS *enters, flying on a winged steed.*^{23]}

OCEANUS:

²⁸⁴⁻⁶⁵After traversing a long journey
I have finally reached you,
Prometheus;
I steered this swift-winged bird
by mental power, without rein or bit.
I share the pain of your misfortunes, I
assure you;
²⁹⁰our kinship,²⁴ I feel, compels me to do
so,
and, quite apart from that, there is no
one to whom
I would pay greater respect than to
you.
I will prove to you that this is true,
and that it is not
in my nature to speak pleasant but
empty words.
²⁹⁵Come now, tell me what should be
done to help you:
you will never say that you have
a firmer friend than Oceanus.

PROMETHEUS: Here, what is this?
Have you too come to be a
spectator of my sufferings? How
did you dare to leave the

³⁰⁰stream that bears your name, and
your self-built, rock-roofed cavern,
and come to this land,²⁵ the
mother of iron? Have you come to
see what has happened to me and
to share my distress? Behold the
spectacle, then – me, the friend of
Zeus,
³⁰⁵who helped establish his
autocracy, what torments I am
now racked with at his hands!

OCEANUS: I see it, Prometheus; and I
also want to give you

³⁰⁹⁻¹⁰advice, the best advice, cunning
though you are. Know your self²⁶
and change to a new pattern of

behaviour, because there is also a new autocrat in the gods' realm. If you go on hurling out such sharp and savage words, Zeus, though he sits far above, may well hear you, with the result that the crowd of miseries you have at present will seem like child's

³¹⁵play. Cast off the temper you have, poor suffering one, and look for a way to escape these troubles. What I am going to say may seem to you rather hackneyed, but these, Prometheus, *are* the wages of an over-arrogant tongue. Are you still
³²⁰not humbled, not yielding to your troubles? Do you want to get more of them, on top of what you have? Well, if you accept me as your adviser, you won't kick out against the goad, being aware that we have a harsh monarch holding
³²⁵irresponsible power. Now I will go and try to see if I can get you released from these sufferings. You keep quiet and don't speak too impetuously; or do you not know very well, exceptionally intelligent as you are, that foolish words lead to punishment being inflicted?

³³⁰ PROMETHEUS: I congratulate you on being safe from accusation, not having dared to share in my efforts. Leave the thing alone now too; don't get involved in it. In any case you won't persuade him, because he's not easy to persuade. And look out for yourself, in case your journey brings you some grief.

³³⁵ OCEANUS: You're much better at admonishing others than you are at admonishing yourself: I judge that by facts,²⁷ not by words. But I

am determined to go; don't drag me back. I tell you, I tell you that Zeus will grant me this boon, so as to release you from these sufferings.

340 PROMETHEUS: I thank you for that, and I shall never cease to be grateful; you are certainly not short of zeal. But don't make the effort. Any effort you make for me, if you do make one, will be wasted and will do no good. Keep quiet, and

345 keep yourself out of harm's way. Even if *my* fortunes are poor, I wouldn't for that reason want suffering to strike as many others as possible! Certainly not, seeing how distressed I am by the fate of my brother Atlas,²⁸ who stands in the

350 lands of the west, supporting on his shoulders the pillars of heaven and earth, a grievous burden on his arms. And I have seen and pitied the earth-born inhabitant of the Cilician cave,²⁹ a fierce monster with a hundred heads, now subdued

355 by force – furious Typhon, who once rose up against the gods,³⁰ hissing terror from his formidable jaws while a fierce radiance flashed from his eyes, with the intention of overthrowing the autocracy of Zeus by force. But there came against him the unsleeping weapon of Zeus, the downrushing thunderbolt breathing out flame, which struck him out of his

360 haughty boasts – for he was hit right in the centre of his body, and his strength was thundered out of

him and reduced
365 to ashes. And now he lies, a
sprawled, inert body, near the
narrows of the sea,³¹ crushed
under the roots of Mount Etna; on
its topmost peaks Hephaestus sits
forging red-hot iron,³² and from
thence one day will burst forth
rivers of fire, devouring
370 with their savage jaws the smooth
fields of Sicily with their fine
crops.³³ Such is the rage in which
Typhos will boil over, raining hot
darts of fiery breath that no one
can touch, even though he has
been calcinated by the thunderbolt
of Zeus. You are not without
experience, and you don't need
375 me to teach you: save yourself, you
know how to. And I will endure
my present fate, until the anger in
Zeus' heart is assuaged.

OCEANUS: So, Prometheus, you don't
know that words are the healers of
a sick temper?³⁴

380 PROMETHEUS: Yes, if one tries to
soften the heart at the right
moment, and doesn't try to reduce
the swollen spirit against its will
when it is still firm.³⁵

OCEANUS: And what harm, tell me,
can you see determination and
courage bringing with them?

PROMETHEUS: Wasted labour and
empty-headed naivety.³⁶

385 OCEANUS: Allow me to suffer from
that affliction: to be sensible while
being thought stupid is the best
policy.³⁷

PROMETHEUS: That shortcoming will
be thought to be *mine*.³⁸

OCEANUS: Your words are plainly
meant to send me back home.

PROMETHEUS: Yes: by lamenting for

me, you risk incurring enmity.

OCEANUS: You mean the enmity of
him who has lately come to sit on
the almighty throne?

³⁹⁰ PROMETHEUS: Take care that his heart
never becomes aggrieved with you.

OCEANUS: Your misfortunes,
Prometheus, serve to instruct me.

PROMETHEUS: On your way, then; off
you go; maintain your present
intentions.

⁵ OCEANUS: As you speak these words, I
am already starting off. My four-
legged bird is beating the smooth
pathway of the air with his wings;
he will be glad to have a rest in his
home stables.

[OCEANUS flies off.]

CHORUS:³⁹

I groan, Prometheus, for your terrible
fate:

³⁹⁹⁻⁴⁰¹ I let fall a flow of teardrops
from my tender eyes, and moisten my
cheek
with their watery stream;
for Zeus, exercising this unlimited
control
under laws of his own making,
⁴⁰⁴⁻⁴ is displaying the arrogance of power
towards the gods of old.

And every land is now crying out in
grief,
⁴⁰⁸⁻¹⁰ lamenting < the destruction of > the
privileges,
magnificent and time-honoured,
of yourself and your brethren:
all the mortals who dwell
in the inhabited abodes of holy Asia
suffer together
with your great and grievous
sufferings,

and the maidens, undaunted by battle,
who inhabit the land of Colchis,⁴⁰
and the Scythian host, who dwell
in the most distant region of earth
around Lake Maeotis,⁴¹

~~and~~ the martial flower of Arabia,⁴²
inhabiting a city on a lofty cliff
near the Caucasus,
a savage host who cry clamorously
as they fight with sharp-tipped spears.

Before now I have seen
~~but~~ one other Titan god subdued,
humbled and bound in such weariless
toil:
Atlas of mighty, surpassing strength,
who upholds on his back
⁴²⁰~~the~~ earth and the vault of the sky.

< But for your fate, Prometheus, the
earth laments, >
the waves of the sea cry out in unison
< with your sufferings >, the depths
groan,
Hades' dark subterranean recesses
rumble in response,
and the flowing streams of holy rivers
⁴²⁵~~lament~~ your piteous pain.

PROMETHEUS: Do not think that my
silence is due to vanity or
arrogance. No, my heart is eaten
up with brooding, when I see
myself treated so outrageously.
After all, who was it but

⁴⁴⁰I that did all the distributing of
privileges to these new gods? But I
will say no more about that,
because I would be telling you
what you already know. Instead,
listen to the miseries of mortals,
how infantile they were before I
made them intelligent

and possessed of understanding. I shall say this, not because I have any desire to criticize humans but to demonstrate the goodwill that inspired my gifts to them. In the beginning, though they had eyes and ears, they could make nothing of what they saw and heard; like dream-figures they

⁴⁵⁰lived a life of utter random confusion all their days. They knew nothing of brick-built, sun-warmed houses, nor of wooden construction; they dwelt underground, like tiny ants,

⁴⁵⁴⁻⁶in the sunless recesses of caves.

Nor had they any reliable indicator of winter, or of flowery spring, or of fruitful summer; they did everything without planning, until I showed them the hard-to-discern risings and settings of stars.⁴³ I also

⁴⁵⁹⁻⁶⁰invented for them the art of number, supreme among all techniques, and that of combining letters into written words, the tool that enables all things to be remembered and is mother of the Muses.⁴⁴ And I was the first to bring beasts⁴⁵ under the yoke as slaves to the yoke-strap and the pack-saddle,

⁴⁶⁵so that they might relieve humans of their greatest labours; and I brought horses to love the rein and pull chariots, making them a luxurious ornament for men of great wealth. And it was no one other than me who invented the linen-winged vehicles in which sailors roam the seas. Such contrivances have I

⁴⁷⁰invented for mortals, yet, wretched that I am, I have no device by

which I can escape from my
present sufferings.

475 CHORUS: Having been subjected to a
painful degradation, you are
mentally straying, robbed of your
wits; like a bad doctor who has
fallen sick, you are in despair and
unable to discover by what
remedies your own condition is
curable.

PROMETHEUS: When you have heard
the rest of what I have to say, you
will be even more amazed by all
the skills and devices that I have
contrived. The greatest was this. If
anyone fell sick, there was no
means of aiding him, neither by
food

480 nor ointment nor potion: they
withered and decayed for want of
remedies, until I showed them how
to mix gentle curative drugs, with
which they can now defend
themselves against all kinds of
diseases. I also systematized many
kinds of seercraft.

485 I was the first to interpret from
dreams what actual events were
destined to happen; I made known
to them the difficult arts of
interpreting significant utterances
and encounters on journeys;⁴⁶ I
defined precisely the flight of
crook-taloned birds, which of them
were favourable and

489–90 which sinister by nature, the habits
of each species and their mutual
hatreds, affections and
companionships;⁴⁷ and the

493–5 smoothness of internal organs,⁴⁸
and what colour bile should have
if it is to be pleasing to the gods,
and the mottled appearance and
proper shape of the liver-lobe; I

wrapped the thigh bones and the long chine in fat and burnt them,⁴⁹ guiding mortals towards a skill of making difficult inferences, and opening their eyes to the signs the flames gave, which till
⁵⁰⁰then had been dark to them. So much for that; but as for the things hidden beneath the earth that benefit humanity – copper, iron, silver and gold – who can claim to have discovered them before I did? No one, I know for sure, unless
⁵⁰⁵he wanted to spout pointless drivel. To sum up everything in a short sentence: know that all the skills that mortals have come from Prometheus.

CHORUS: Well, don't benefit mortals beyond the proper measure while neglecting yourself when you are in distress. I

^{509–10}am confident that you will yet be released from these bonds and be no less powerful than Zeus.

PROMETHEUS: The decisive decree of destiny is not ordained to bring that to pass in that way yet awhile: only after being racked by countless pains and torments am I at last to escape these bonds. Craft is far weaker than Necessity.

⁵¹⁵ CHORUS: Well, who is the steersman of Necessity?⁵⁰

PROMETHEUS: The triple Fates and the unforgetting Furies.

CHORUS: You mean Zeus is less strong than these?

PROMETHEUS: Certainly he cannot escape destiny.

CHORUS: And what is Zeus' destiny, if not to reign eternally?

⁵²⁰ PROMETHEUS: I will not go on to tell you that: do not persist in asking.

CHORUS: It must be something
awesome that you are concealing.

PROMETHEUS: Mention some other
matter. It is certainly not time to
reveal this one – it must be kept as
closely hidden as

⁵²⁵possible, because by keeping it safe
I can escape this degrading
bondage and pain.

CHORUS:

May Zeus, the disposer of all things,
never set his power in opposition to
my will;
nor may I be backward
⁵³⁰in piously approaching the gods with
feasts
of slaughtered oxen beside the
immortal stream of my father,
Oceanus;
nor may I sin in speech,
but may this abide for me
and ⁵³⁵never melt away:

it is pleasant to pass
the length of one's life in confident
hopes, nourishing
one's spirit amid bright joys.
⁵⁴⁰But I shudder to look on you,
tormented by countless woes < >:
for you do not fear Zeus,
and, following your individual
judgement, Prometheus,
you give too much honour to mortals.

⁵⁴⁵Come, my friend, what favour has this
favour done you?
Tell me, where do you find any
support?
What help can there be from creatures
of a day? Did you not even
consider
⁵⁴⁹⁻⁵⁵⁰the helpless, dreamlike feebleness by
which

the blind race of men is fettered?
Never
will the schemes of mortals transgress
the ordering of Zeus.

I learned this from seeing
your wretched fortune, Prometheus;
and ⁵⁶⁷this song that has flown to my lips
is very different
from the wedding song I sang in
honour of bath⁵¹ and bed
on the occasion of your marriage,
when you wooed and won
my⁵⁶⁹ sister Hesione⁵² to be your wife
and bedfellow.
[Enter IO, horned like a cow.]

IO:

< Ió! >
What land, what people are these?
Who should I say this is
that I see, wind-battered,
harnessed to the rocks?
For what crime are you thus being
murdered?
⁵⁷⁴Tell me where on earth
I have wandered in my misery.

[She begins to dance wildly.]
Oh, oh! Ah, ah!
A gadfly is stinging me again,
wretched me! –
[Suddenly changing direction:]
Keep him off! Ah, dah! I < am mad
with > fear,
seeing the myriad-eyed cowherd!⁵³
He is on the move, keeping a crafty
eye:
⁵⁷⁹even though he is dead, the earth
cannot cover him –
he crosses over from the underworld
to hunt me – wretched me! – and
makes me wander
starving along the sands of the
seashore;

and in accompaniment the noisy reed-
pipe, fashioned with wax,⁵⁴
drones its soporific⁵⁵ melody.

Ió, ió, popoi –

where have my far-flung wanderings
brought me?

What crime, son of Cronus, what
crime is it you have

found me guilty of,
that you have yoked me to these
sufferings – ah, ah! –

⁵⁸⁰and torment me out of my mind like
this,

wretched that I am, ever driven by the
fearful gadfly?

Burn me with fire, or bury me in the
earth,

or give me as prey to the monsters of
the sea:

do not begrudge
my prayer, O lord!

⁷⁸⁵My far-flung wanderings
have exhausted me utterly, and I
cannot tell how

to escape my sufferings.

[*To PROMETHEUS:*] Do you hear the
voice of the maiden with cow's
horns?

⁵⁹⁰ PROMETHEUS: How could I not hear
the gadfly-driven daughter of
Inachus, who warmed the heart of
Zeus with desire and who now,
hated by Hera, has been forced
into this lengthy, exhausting
flight?

IO:

How are you able to utter the name of
my father?

Tell me, miserable that I am, who are
you,

⁵⁹⁵who are you, suffering one,
that can address me, who suffer too,
so correctly,

and can name my god-sent affliction,
which withers me and pricks me with
stings that force me to wander –
ah, ah?

Starving, with undignified leaps and
bounds,

I ~~have~~⁹⁹⁰ come here, rushing wildly,
mastered by the wiles of an angry
Hera.

Who among the wretched – *oi*, ah, ah!

–

suffer as I do?

~~Give~~⁹⁹⁵ me a clear indication
of what still lies in store for me
to suffer. What means of escape, what
cure for my affliction?

Reveal it, if you know it:
speak and tell it to the wretched
wandering maiden.

10 PROMETHEUS: I will tell you clearly all
that you wish to learn, not
weaving it in riddles but in plain
speech, in the way that it is right
to open one's lips to friends.⁵⁶ You
see before you Prometheus, who
gave fire to mortals.

IO: Unhappy Prometheus, you who
have shown yourself the common
benefactor of all humanity! What
are you undergoing this
punishment for?

615 PROMETHEUS: I have just finished
lamenting my sufferings.

IO: Then will you not grant me this
boon?

PROMETHEUS: Say what boon you
want: whatever it is, you will learn
it from me.

IO: Tell me who bound you in this
ravine.

PROMETHEUS: The decision of Zeus
and the hand of Hephaestus.

620 IO: And for what wrongdoing are you
paying the penalty?

PROMETHEUS: By explaining just so much to you, I have done enough.⁵⁷

IO: And in addition to that, reveal to me what time will mark the end of my miserable wanderings.

PROMETHEUS: It is better for you not to learn that than to learn it.

625 IO: Please do not conceal from me what I am destined to suffer.

PROMETHEUS: I do not begrudge you this boon.

IO: Why then are you waiting instead of telling it all to me?

PROMETHEUS: Not from any ill-will, but I am reluctant to disturb your mind.

IO: Do not take more care for my welfare than pleases me.

630 PROMETHEUS: Since you are so eager, I must speak. Listen, then.

CHORUS: Not yet! Give me, too, a share of the pleasure. Let us first ask about her affliction, and let her tell us herself of her disastrous fortunes; as to the trials that still await her, let her be informed by you.

635 PROMETHEUS: It is for you, Io, to do this group a favour, especially since they are sisters of your father.⁵⁸ It is something worthwhile to weep and lament thoroughly over one's misfortunes, in circumstances where one can expect to wring tears from the listeners.

640 IO: I do not know how I can refuse your request. You will learn clearly everything you want to know – though I am ashamed even to speak of the god-sent tempest and the ruin of my appearance, how they swooped into my wretched

- ⁶⁴⁵my maiden chamber I was
persistently visited by nocturnal
visions which coaxed me in
smooth words: 'Most greatly
blessed maiden, why do you
remain a virgin so long, when you
could have the greatest of unions?
Zeus has been struck
⁶⁵⁰by a dart of desire coming from
you, and wishes to partake of
Cypris with you. Do not, my child,
spurn the bed of Zeus, but go out
to the deep meadow of Lerna,
among the flocks and cow byres of
your father, so that Zeus' eye may
be
⁶⁵⁵assuaged of its desire.' Every night
I was miserably plagued by dreams
like that, until I brought myself to
tell my father about the dreams
that kept coming to me nightly. He
sent envoys repeatedly to Delphi
and Dodona to consult the
⁶⁶⁰oracles, so that he could learn
what he should do or say so as to
act in a manner pleasing to the
gods: they returned reporting
ambiguous responses, their
expression obscure and hard to
interpret. Finally a clear word
came to Inachus,
⁶⁶⁵plainly telling and enjoining him
to thrust me out of my house and
my native place, to wander
unprotected on the furthest
confines of the land; and that if he
refused, a fiery thunderbolt would
come from Zeus that would
annihilate
⁶⁷⁰his entire family. Persuaded by
these oracles of Loxias, he expelled
me and shut me out of his house –
as reluctant to do it as I was to go:

the bridle of Zeus compelled him
against his will to act thus.
Immediately my body and mind
were

⁶⁷⁵twisted. I grew horns, as you now
see; I was pricked by the sharp
sting of a gadfly; and, with
maddened leaps, I rushed off to the
stream of Cerchnea,⁵⁹ good to
drink from, and the spring of
Lerna; and my footsteps were
dogged by the earth-born
herdsman Argus, intemperate in
his fierceness, staring with his
many eyes. A swift death
unexpectedly

⁶⁸⁰robbed him of life, but I, harassed
by the gadfly as if by a divine
scourge, have been driven on from
land to land. You hear what has
happened to me. If you can say
what still

⁶⁸⁵remains of my sufferings, tell me.
And do not, out of pity, excite me
with false tales: I think that
concocted stories are a most
disgraceful plague.

CHORUS:

Here, here, keep away! Ah,
never, never did I suppose such a
strange tale
would come to my hearing,
⁶⁹⁰nor that sufferings so painful to see, so
painful to bear,
would strike my soul
with a double-pronged goad of terror!
Io! Destiny, destiny!
⁶⁹⁵I shudder when I see what Io is
experiencing!

PROMETHEUS: You are groaning, and
full of fear, so early? Wait until
you have learned the rest as well!

CHORUS: Speak, tell us all. For the afflicted, you know, it is pleasant to understand clearly in advance the pain they have still to suffer.

700 PROMETHEUS: You obtained your previous request from me easily, since you first wanted to learn from her the account of her own trials. Now hear about the future, what sufferings

705 this young woman is destined to endure at Hera's hands. And you, child of Inachus, take my words to heart, so that you may learn how your journey will end. In the first place, starting from here, turn towards the sunrise and travel over the uncultivated plains.⁶⁰ You will come to the nomad Scythians,
710 who dwell in wicker homes, off the ground, on strong- wheeled wagons, armed with far-shooting bows. Do not go near them: go on through and out of their country, keeping your path close to the rocky coast of the groaning sea. Next,

715 on your left hand, dwell the Chalybes,⁶¹ workers in iron: beware of them, for they are savage and not safe for strangers to approach. You will then come to the Violent River,⁶² not inaptly named; do not cross it – it is not easy to cross – until

720 you come to Caucasus itself, the highest of mountains, where the river pours its strength out from the very summit. After crossing over those peaks close to the stars, you must take the way to the south, where you will come to the man-hating

725 host of the Amazons, who will one

day settle at Themiscyra on the
Thermodon, where is the savage
cape of Salmydessus, inhospitable
to sailors, the stepmother of
ships.⁶³ They will be very glad to
guide you on your way. You will
then come

⁷²⁹⁻³⁰to the Cimmerian isthmus,⁶⁴ right
at the narrow gateway to the lake;
with a bold heart you must leave it
and cross the Maeotic channel.
Your crossing will in all future
time be much spoken of among
men, and the channel will be
named after it: Bosporus, 'Strait of
the Cow'. Having thus left the
⁷³⁵land of Europe, you will have
come to the continent of Asia. [*To*
the CHORUS:] Do you think that the
autocrat of the gods is equally
brutal in all his dealings? That
god, because he wanted to sleep
with this mortal girl, imposed
these wanderings

⁷³⁹⁻⁴⁰on her! [*To* IO:] You found an
unpleasant suitor for your hand,
young woman; for with all of what
you've so far heard, you should
consider that you're not yet even
at the beginning of things.

IO: *Ió*, oh, oh! Ah me!

PROMETHEUS: You are crying out and
moaning aloud again. What can
one imagine you will do when you
learn what remains of your
troubles?

⁷⁴⁵ CHORUS: You mean you are going to
tell her of sufferings that still
remain for her?

PROMETHEUS: A stormy sea of ruinous
sorrows.

IO: What good does life do me? Why
do I not straight away throw
myself from this rugged rock,⁶⁵ so

that I can crash

⁷⁵⁰to the ground and be rid of all my troubles? It is better to die once and for all than to suffer terribly all the days of my life.

PROMETHEUS: You would certainly find it hard to endure *my* trials. For me, death is not in my destiny: that would have

⁷⁵⁵been a release from my sufferings. As it is, no end has been set for my toils, until Zeus falls from his autocratic ruler- ship.

IO: You mean it is possible that Zeus will one day fall from power?

PROMETHEUS: I imagine you'd be pleased to see that event.

IO: Of course, seeing how Zeus has ill-treated me.

⁷⁶⁰ PROMETHEUS: Well, you can take it that it is so, and rejoice.

IO: By whom will he be robbed of his autocratic sceptre?

PROMETHEUS: By himself – by his own foolish decision.

IO: In what way? Explain, if it doesn't do any harm.

PROMETHEUS: He will make a marriage that he will come to regret.

⁷⁶⁵ IO: With a goddess or a mortal? Tell me, if you can.

PROMETHEUS: Why do you ask what marriage? I must not speak or utter it.

IO: Is he to be removed from his throne by his wife?

PROMETHEUS: She will bear a son superior to his father.⁶⁶

IO: And is there no escape for him from that fate?

⁷⁷⁰ PROMETHEUS: None, unless I were to provide it after being released from my bonds.

IO: And who is going to release you,
against the will of Zeus?

PROMETHEUS: It is destined to be one
of your offspring.

IO: What are you saying? Is my son
going to free you from your
sufferings?

PROMETHEUS: He will be the third in
birth on top of ten other births.⁶⁷

⁷⁷⁵ IO: This time the meaning of your
prophecy is not easy to guess.

PROMETHEUS: Then don't expect to
learn about all *your* future
troubles, either.

IO: Don't hold out a benefit to me and
then rob me of it.

PROMETHEUS: I will present you with
one or the other of two tales.

IO: What tales? Put them before me
and give me the choice.

⁷⁸⁰ PROMETHEUS: I give it to you. Choose:
I will tell you plainly either the
troubles that remain for you, or
the person who will release me.

CHORUS: Please be willing to give one
of these favours to her and the
other to me. Tell her about the rest
of her wanderings,

⁷⁸⁵and tell me about your deliverer: I
long to hear that.

PROMETHEUS: Since you are so eager,
I will not refuse to tell you
everything you ask for. First, Io, I
shall tell you about the wanderings
on which you will be driven:
inscribe them

⁷⁹⁰on the memory tablets of your
mind. When you have crossed the
stream that parts the two
continents, go on towards the fiery
rising of the sun, crossing a
waveless sea,⁶⁸ until you reach the
land of the Gorgons, the plain of
Cisthene, where

the Phorcides⁶⁹ dwell, three
ancient maidens of swan-like
aspect,⁷⁰ owning an eye in
common and having only a single
tooth, whom neither the sun with
his rays, nor the moon by night,
ever looks upon;⁷¹ and near them
their three winged

⁸⁰⁰sisters, the snake-tressed Gorgons,
haters of humans, whom no mortal
can look on and draw another
breath. This is what I tell you as a
warning to beware; now hear of
another disagreeable sight. You
must beware of the sharp-toothed,

⁸⁰⁴⁻⁵unbarking hounds of Zeus, the
griffins, and the one-eyed, horse-
riding host of the Arimaspians,⁷²
who dwell by the stream of the
river Pluto,⁷³ which flows with
gold: do not go near them. You
will then come to a land at the
furthest bounds of earth, to a black
tribe that dwells at the sources of

⁸¹⁰the sun,⁷⁴ where flows the river
Aethiops. Follow the bank of this
river until you come to the
cataract⁷⁵ where the Nile pours
down from the Bybline Mountains
its holy stream, good to drink
from. It will lead you to the three-
cornered

⁸¹⁵land of Nilotis,⁷⁶ where, Io, you are
destined to found a settlement far
from home for yourself and your
children. If any of this is obscure
and hard to understand, please ask
again and you will learn it more
clearly. I have ample leisure –
more than I want.

⁸²⁰ CHORUS: If you have anything still
left, or previously omitted, to tell
her about her terrible wanderings,
tell it. If you have told it all, then

give us, in our turn, the favour we
ask for – I am sure you remember
about it.

PROMETHEUS: She has heard about her
journey right to the end. But so
that she can know that what she
has heard from

⁸²⁵me is not an empty story, I will tell
her about the troubles she has
endured before coming here,
offering this as the evidence
verifying my words. [*To* 10:] I shall
leave out the great majority of the
story and go straight to the last
part of your wanderings. When
you had come to the lands of
⁸³⁰Molossia and approached the lofty
ridge of Dodona, home of the
oracular seat of Thesprotian Zeus
and of the incredible marvel of the
speaking oak trees, by which you
were addressed, openly and not in
riddling words, as Zeus' glorious
⁸³⁵consort that was to be – does any
of this strike a chord with you? –
from there, in gadfly-driven
madness, you rushed on your way
along the coast to the great gulf of
Rhea,⁷⁷ from which you have then
had to run, as it were, before the
storm,

^{839–40}wandering in the opposite
direction.⁷⁸ Know well that for the
future that arm of the sea shall be
called 'Ionian', to be for all
mankind a memorial to your
journey.⁷⁹ You have all this as
evidence that my mind can see
more than what is manifest. [*To*
the CHORUS:] The rest I shall tell to
you and to her

⁸⁴⁵alike, going back to the same track
my previous words were treading.
There is a city called Canobus,⁸⁰ on

the edge of land and sea, right at
 the mouth of the Nile where it lays
 down its silt. There Zeus will
 restore you to your right mind
 <and cause you to conceive>
 simply by touching you and laying
 850-51 his hand on you, nothing to be
 afraid of. And you will bear a
 black child, Epaphus, named after
 the manner in which Zeus
 engendered him;⁸¹ he will reap the
 fruits of all the
 853-5 land that is watered by the broad-
 flowing Nile. The fifth generation
 from him, a female brood of fifty
 children,⁸² will come back to
 Argos, not by choice but in flight
 from a kindred marriage to their
 cousins; the cousins, their minds
 excited by lust, hawks following
 close behind the doves,⁸³ will come
 to hunt marriages that they should
 not have been hunting, but god
 will deny them possession of their
 bodies.
 860 The Pelasgian land will be
 drenched with blood by deadly
 female violence when the men are
 audaciously slain in the wakeful
 night; for each woman will deprive
 her husband of his life, dipping a
 two-edged sword in his blood. So
 may the
 865 bridal night be for my enemies!⁸⁴
 But one of the girls⁸⁵ will be
 charmed by desire into refraining
 from killing her bed-fellow; she
 will choose the alternative of being
 called a coward rather than a
 polluted murderer. She will
 become the
 870 mother of a royal house in Argos.
 It would take a long narrative to
 recount it all explicitly, but from

her line, at any rate, will be born a
brave scion, famous for archery,
who will release me from these
sufferings. Such is the prophecy
that was narrated to me by my
mother of ancient birth, Themis
⁸⁷⁵the Titaness; but how and in what
way it is to happen would take a
lengthy narrative to explain, and
you would profit nothing by
learning it.
[*IO begins to dance wildly again.*]

IO:

Eleleu, eleleu!
My mind is struck again by hot spasms
⁸⁷⁸of madness, and I am pricked
⁸⁸⁰by the gadfly's fiery dart!
In terror my heart is thumping my
midriff,
my eyes are rolling in circles,
I am blown off course by the wild
winds
of insanity, I cannot control my
tongue,
⁸⁸²and its turbid, random flow of words
dashes against the hateful waves of
ruin.
[*IO rushes away in the opposite
direction to that from which she
entered.*]

CHORUS:

Truly wise, truly wise was he
who first grasped this in his mind
and expressed it clearly with his
tongue,
⁸⁹⁰that it is best by far to marry in one's
own station,
and that a poor man should not yearn
to wed
either among those who luxuriate in
wealth
or among those who glory in their
high birth.

Never, never,
⁸⁰⁵ O < > Fates, may you see me
as the sharer of Zeus' bed,
nor may I be united with any partner
from among the heavenly ones:
for I am afraid when I see
Io, the man-shunning virgin,
devastated
⁸⁹⁰ by the terrible, troublous, vagrant
wanderings caused by Hera.

For me, when marriage is on my own
level,
it inspires no fear; but I do fear
that the eye of a superior god, from
which one cannot flee,
may look on me with desire.
Against such a campaign one cannot
fight, against such craft one is
helpless;
⁹⁰⁵ there would be nothing I could do
with myself:
I cannot see how
I could escape the wiles of Zeus.

PROMETHEUS: I declare to you that
Zeus, arrogant though his thoughts
are, will yet be brought low: such
is the union he is

⁹⁰⁹⁻¹⁰ preparing to make, which will cast
him out of his autocracy and off
his throne into oblivion. Then
indeed the curse of his father
Cronus, which he uttered when *he*
fell from his ancient throne, will be
completely fulfilled. None of the
gods, except myself, will be able to
show him clearly the way to avoid
⁹¹⁵ such misery: I know it all, and how
it will happen. So let him now sit
there feeling secure, trusting in his
celestial noise- making and
brandishing his fire-breathing
weapon in his hands: they will not

avail in the least to save him from falling

⁹²⁰a disgraceful, unendurable fall.

Such is the contender that he is even now himself preparing against himself, a monster almost impossible to fight against, who will discover a fire more powerful than the lightning bolt, a mighty crash surpassing the thunder, and a weapon to plague the sea and

⁹²⁵shake the earth which will shatter to pieces the three-pointed spear of Poseidon. By stumbling into this evil fate, Zeus will learn how far apart are rulership and slavery.

CHORUS: You're just saying things against Zeus that you would *like* to be true.

PROMETHEUS: I am saying what will come to pass and *also* what I desire.

⁹³⁰CHORUS: You mean it's actually to be expected that someone will lord it over Zeus?

PROMETHEUS: And he will have to bear an even harsher yoke of suffering than this.

CHORUS: How can you not be afraid to hurl out such words?

PROMETHEUS: Why should I be afraid, when death is not in my destiny?

CHORUS: But he could put you to a trial even more painful than this.

⁹³⁵PROMETHEUS: Well, let him do so: nothing could take me by surprise.

CHORUS: Those who bow to Necessity⁸⁶ are wise.

PROMETHEUS: Revere and pray and truckle to whoever is currently in command! To me, Zeus matters less than nothing.

^{939–40}Let him rule and act as he likes for this short time: he will not be

ruling the gods for long. [HERMES is *seen approaching*.] But I see Zeus' message-boy is here, the servant of the new autocrat; he will certainly have something fresh to announce.

945 HERMES: You, the clever fellow,⁸⁷ too spiteful for your own good, you who committed a crime against the gods by giving privileges to beings who live for a day, you, the fire-thief – it's you I'm talking to. The Father orders you to state what this union is about which you are bragging, the one that is to cause his fall from power; and you are to say this not in

950 riddles but plainly and precisely. And do not compel me, Prometheus, to make a second journey; you are aware that Zeus is not softened by such methods.

PROMETHEUS: Haughtily spoken and full of pride, these words are, for a mere menial of the gods! You⁸⁸ are young and your

955 rule is young, and you *think* that you inhabit a citadel that grief cannot enter. Have I not observed two successive autocrats⁸⁹ cast out of it? And to the third, the one who reigns now, I shall see it happen too – very shamefully, and very

960 soon. Do I seem to you at all to be afraid of the new gods, and cowering before them? I am very far indeed from that – the furthest possible! You hurry back the way you came; you will learn nothing of what you have asked of me.

965 HERMES: This is just the kind of arrogant behaviour by which you landed yourself in this trouble in

the first place.

PROMETHEUS: I can tell you for sure, I wouldn't exchange my misfortunes for your servitude.

HERMES: Oh, I suppose it's better to be in servitude to this rock than to be the faithful messenger of my father, Zeus!

970 PROMETHEUS: < >!⁹⁰ That is how one ought to insult the insolent.

HERMES: You seem to be revelling in your present situation.

PROMETHEUS: Revelling? May I see my enemies revelling like this – and I'm counting you among them!

HERMES: Why, are you accusing me as well on account of what has happened to you?

975 PROMETHEUS: Quite simply, I hate *all* the gods who are so unjustly harming me after I helped them.

HERMES: From what I can hear, you've got a serious mental sickness.

PROMETHEUS: I'm happy to be sick, if it's a sickness to hate one's enemies.

HERMES: You'd be quite intolerable if you were prospering.

980 PROMETHEUS: Ah me!⁹¹

HERMES: That is not an expression that Zeus understands.

PROMETHEUS: Well, time, as it grows old, teaches everything! HERMES: Well, *you* don't yet understand how to be sensible.

PROMETHEUS: No – if I were, I wouldn't be speaking to a menial like you.

HERMES: It looks as though you mean to say nothing of what the Father has asked you to say.

985 PROMETHEUS: Well, I'd willingly pay him that favour – if I owed him

one.

HERMES: You seem to be making fun
of me as if I were a child.

PROMETHEUS: Well, *aren't* you a child,
or even more senseless than a
child, if you expect to get any
information from me? There is no
ill-treatment, no contrivance, by
which Zeus will

⁹⁹⁰induce me to reveal this secret,
until these degrading bonds have
been unloosed. So let him hurl his
blazing fire, let him throw
everything into turmoil and
confusion with his white feathers
of snow and his thunders rumbling
beneath the

⁹⁹⁵earth: none of that will bend me to
make me say at whose hands he is
destined to fall from his supreme
power.

HERMES: Consider whether this
attitude seems likely to be to your
advantage.

PROMETHEUS: This has all been
considered, and planned, long ago.

¹⁰⁰⁰ HERMES: Bring yourself, you fool,
bring yourself at long last, in the
light of your present sufferings, to
take a sensible view.

PROMETHEUS: You are making
yourself a nuisance to no purpose,
as if you were giving advice to the
waves. Let it never enter your
thoughts that I might fear the
intentions of Zeus, become
womanish in mentality and
implore the one I hate

¹⁰⁰⁵so greatly, stretching out my
upturned palms as women do, to
free me from these bonds. One
hundred per cent, no!

HERMES: It looks as though, however
much I say, I will say it in vain. My

entreaties have made you no softer
or more

1009–10 pliable; like a newly harnessed
colt, you have taken the bit
between your teeth, and you are
struggling and fighting against the
reins. But it is an unsound strategy
that makes you so vehement: for
someone who is not thinking
sensibly, pure unadulterated
obstinacy has no power at all. If
you do

1015 not do as I have said, consider
what a tempest, what a triple wave
of evil, will assail you, from which
no escape will be possible. In the
first place, the Father will tear this
rugged ravine wall into fragments
with his thunder and the fire of his
lightning bolt, and will bury you
under it, gripped in the

1020 embrace of the rocks. After the
completion of a vast length of
time, you will come back again to
the light; and then, I tell you, the
winged hound of Zeus, the
bloodthirsty eagle, will greedily
butcher your body into great
ragged shreds,

1025 coming uninvited for a banquet
that lasts all day, and will feast on
your liver, which will turn black
with gnawing.⁹² Of such torment
expect no end until some god
appears to be your successor in
suffering and is willing to go down
to

1030 rayless Hades and the dark depths
of Tartarus.⁹³ Make your decision
in the light of that, because this
threat is no invention, it has all too
certainly been uttered. For the
mouth of Zeus does not know how
to lie; he fulfils every word he

speaks.⁹⁴ So consider and reflect:
do not suppose that self-will is ever
better policy than prudence.

CHORUS: In our opinion, what Hermes
says is not beside the point: he
urges you to abandon self-will and
to pursue wise prudence. Follow
his advice: it is shameful for the
wise to err.

PROMETHEUS:

¹⁰⁴⁰⁻⁴¹ When he announced this message to
me, I tell you,
I already knew it; and there is no
disgrace
in an enemy suffering ill-treatment
from his enemy.
So let the double-ended tress of fire⁹⁵
be hurled against me, let the air
¹⁰⁴⁵ be set awirl by thunder and by a
convulsion
of savage gales; let the wind
shake earth from its foundations, roots
and all,
and let the waves of the sea with their
ferocious surge
¹⁰⁴⁸⁻⁵¹ engulf the paths of the stars
in heaven; let him cast my body
headlong into black Tartarus,
whirling down in cruel compulsion:
come what may, he won't kill me.

HERMES:

¹⁰⁵¹⁻⁵ That decision, and those words,
sound as though they came from a
lunatic.
In what way do this fellow's boasts
fall short of insanity and mental
derangement?
[Addressing the CHORUS:]
But you at least, the sympathizers
¹⁰⁵⁶⁻⁶⁰ with his suffering, should quickly
leave this place for some other,
lest the merciless roar of the thunder
strike the wits out of your minds.

CHORUS [*moving closer to*
PROMETHEUS]:

Say something else; give me advice
that will actually persuade me,
because that was certainly
¹⁰⁶⁵not a tolerable suggestion that you
trailed past me.
How can you advise me to behave like
a coward?
I am willing to stay with him and
suffer what I must;⁹⁶
for I have learned to hate traitors,
and there is no plague
~~that~~¹⁰⁷⁰ I detest more than that.

HERMES:

Well, remember what I have
proclaimed,
and when disaster hunts you down
do not complain about your fate, nor
ever say
¹⁰⁷⁴⁻⁵that Zeus cast you into a calamity
that you had not foreseen.
No, indeed; you will have brought it
on yourselves,
for knowingly, not by surprise
nor by deception,
you will have been caught up in the
inescapable net
of disaster through your own folly.
[Exit HERMES. *Wild music begins to*
play, and thunder is heard.]

PROMETHEUS:

¹⁰⁸⁰Now in deed, no more in word alone,
the earth is shaking and reeling!
From the depths, in accompaniment,
there bellows
the sound of thunder; fiery twists
¹⁰⁸⁴⁻⁵of lightning shine out; the dust
is whirled by whirlwinds; the blasts
of all the winds at once leap at one
another
in a raging display of mutual strife,
and sky and sea are blended into one.
¹⁰⁸⁹⁻⁹⁰Such is the tempest that has plainly

come
from Zeus upon me, to strike terror.
[*As the CHORUS scatter and flee in
panic*]
O my honoured mother, O Sky
around whom rolls the light that
shines on all,
see how unjustly I suffer!
[*The rock breaks open, and
PROMETHEUS disappears into its
interior.*⁹⁷]

Prometheus Unbound

Prometheus Unbound was the sequel to Prometheus Bound, and matches it so well in content, theme and technique as to make it safe to say that 'if ever two plays were composed together, these two were' (M. L. West, *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 99 (1979), p. 130).

Prometheus had been told by Hermes (Prometheus Bound 1020–25) that, after a long period beneath the earth, he would be brought back to its surface but would then be persistently tormented by the eagle of Zeus eating at his liver. At the beginning of Prometheus Unbound this prediction has been fulfilled (fr. 193). Prometheus is visited by the Chorus of his brother Titans (frr. 190–93), who have apparently been released by Zeus from their underground imprisonment, and tells them of his sufferings. Then – again as predicted in the previous play – Heracles arrives, having got lost on his way to attempt the most distant of his Labours: the taking of the apples of the Hesperides (cf. Strabo, Geography 4.1.7). He shoots the eagle (fr. 200) and is given directions for his journey (frr. 195–9). Prometheus and Zeus are still at enmity (fr. 201), but there was subsequently a reconciliation between them, with Prometheus revealing the secret with which he might otherwise have caused the overthrow of Zeus – that Thetis, for whom Zeus has conceived a passion, is destined to bear a son mightier than his father. We learn of honours given to Prometheus in memory of his bondage (fr. 202), and it has often been suggested that there may have been mention of the establishment of his Athenian cult. The reconciliation may have been effected through Prometheus' mother, Gaea-Themis, whose name is wrongly included, together with that of Heracles, in the list of dramatis personae appended to the ancient headnote ('Hypothesis') to Prometheus Bound; she had once before been responsible for effecting an alliance between Prometheus and Zeus (Prometheus Bound 209–18), and it would be appropriate if she were to do so again. The seemingly impossible condition set by Hermes (Prometheus Bound 1026–9) for the ending of Prometheus' affliction must also have been fulfilled (see note on that passage).

Prometheus Unbound appears to have been imitated or parodied by the

comic dramatist Cratinus in his play *The Wealth-Gods* (Ploutoi), probably produced in 429 BC. The 'Wealth-Gods' of the Chorus identify themselves as Titans (Cratinus fr. 171.11); they had at one time been imprisoned (ibid. 20, 21), but 'now that the rule of tyranny [has been dissolved] and the demos is in power' they have come in search of their 'old brother... even if he is now rotting away' (ibid. 22–6). We do not know whether Prometheus himself appeared on stage in Cratinus' play.

We cannot tell what other plays were produced together with *Prometheus Bound* and *Unbound*. It was long believed that the play listed in the medieval catalogue of Aeschylus' plays as *Prometheus the Fire-Bearer* was the first or third play of a *Prometheus* trilogy; but it is more likely to be an alternative (and more accurate) title for the satyr drama of 472 BC cited elsewhere as *Prometheus the Fire-Kindler* (see above, pp. 52–54). If *Bound* and *Unbound* were presented to the public, long after Aeschylus' death, with the claim that they were newly discovered plays by him never produced before (see above, pp. 159–60), it is quite possible that they were accompanied by revivals of two genuine Aeschylean plays, not necessarily on related subjects.

190

CHORUS:

We <Titans (?)> have come,
Prometheus, to behold these trials
you undergo
and this bondage that you suffer.
*These chanted anapaests were
probably the opening words of the
play.*

191

CHORUS:

To (?) the Phasis,¹ the great twin
boundary
of the lands of Europe and Asia.
*Again from the Chorus' anapaestic
entrance chant, following fr. 190 at a
short interval (fr. 192 may have
come between them).*

192

CHORUS:

And the mighty, crimson-bottomed
waters
of the Red Sea,²

and the bay beside the Ocean,
flashing like bronze (?),
that gives sustenance to the black
(?) Ethiopians,

⁵where the all-seeing Sun always
refreshes his immortal flesh and
his fatigued horses
in its warm flow
of gentle water.³

*Another extract from the Chorus'
anapaestic entrance chant; logically
it should come between fr. 190 and
191 in a description of a journey
from the eastern ends of the earth to
Prometheus' rock in furthest Scythia.*

193⁴

PROMETHEUS: Seed of the Titans, kin of
my own blood, off-spring of
Uranus, behold me bound and
chained to these rugged rocks, as
fearful sailors, terrified of the
night, tie up

⁵their ship in a roaring strait. It was
Zeus, son of Cronus, who thus
fixed me here, and the hand of
Hephaestus assented to Zeus'
decree. He, with cruel skill, thrust
in these wedges, breaking through
my body; and, pierced through by
his craftsmanship, I dwell in
misery in this fortress of the
Furies.

¹⁰Now, every other deadly day the
agent of Zeus wings its sinister way
here, savages me with its curved
talons and tears me apart to make
its barbarous meal; then, amply
stuffed and gorged with the fatness
of my liver, it makes a vast racket

¹⁵and, as it flies off into the sky, it
licks my blood with its tail
feathers. And when the liver on
which it has fed has been renewed
and reinflated, then it comes back

and sets itself greedily again to its cruel feeding. Thus I provide nourishment to this warder of my wretched torture, who defiles my ²⁰living body with endless misery; for held fast, as you see I am, in Zeus' chains, I am unable to keep this terrible bird away from my breast. And so, bereaved of my own self, I endure a succession of anguishing torments, ever seeking an end to my suffering, longing for death. But the power of Zeus ²⁵keeps death far away from me, and this ancient, lamentable atrocity, accumulated through generations of horror, is indelibly imprinted in my body – my body, from which fall drops⁵ melted by the heat of the sun, which continually drip on to the rocks of the Caucasus.⁶

195

PROMETHEUS: Keep straight on this way, and first of all you will come to the blasts of the north wind; here beware of its noisy squalls, lest one suddenly snatch you up and whirl you aloft in its stormy vortex. *Giving directions to Heracles.*

196

PROMETHEUS: And then you will come to the most righteous and most hospitable people of all <mankind>, the Gabians,⁷ among whom neither the plough nor the earth-cutting mattock

⁵cleaves the soil, but self-sown fields yield men an ample livelihood.

Further instructions to Heracles.

197 [Apollonius of Rhodes] says⁸ that the Ister flows down from the land

of the Hyperboreans and the Rhipaeen Mountains; in saying this he follows Aeschylus, who said it in *Prometheus Unbound*. *This too will have come from Prometheus' directions to Heracles.*

199

PROMETHEUS: Then you will come to the dauntless host of the Ligurians, where, bold as you are, you will not, I know for sure, be eager for battle; for it is fated that there you will run

⁴⁻⁵out of arrows, and you will not be able to take any stones from the ground,⁹ because the whole place is soft soil. But your Father will see your distress and take pity on you: he will bring a cloud over the land and cover it completely with a hail of round stones.¹⁰ With these you will then pelt the Ligurian army and easily put them to flight. *Further instructions to Heracles for his journey to the Hesperides.*

200

HERACLES: And may Apollo the Hunter direct my arrow straight!

Heracles' prayer as he draws his bow to shoot the eagle.

201

PROMETHEUS: This son, my dearest friend, of a father who is my enemy.

*Speaking of Heracles.*¹¹

202 Aeschylus in *Prometheus Unbound* says clearly that we put garlands on our heads in honour of Prometheus,¹² as recompense for his binding.

Notes

THE PERSIANS

1. <...> Angled brackets indicate that the words enclosed between them are a tentative restoration of words presumed to have been lost from the transmitted text, or a tentative correction of a passage which the manuscripts present in a badly corrupt form.
2. *Agbatana*: The capital of Media, about 300 km north of Susa; usually called Ecbatana by Herodotus and later Greek authors (modern Hamadan).
3. *Cissia*: Aeschylus seems to take this as the name of a city (cf. 120); it was in fact the name of the region (today Khuzestan, or al-Ahwaz, in south-western Iran) of which Susa was the chief city.
4. *Such were... Astaspes*: Here begins the first of three long catalogues of leaders of the army (the others are at 302–28 and 957– 99). A substantial proportion of them are, certainly or probably, genuine Persian names; most of the others would give a Greek ear the impression of being Persian or at least exotic. There is, however, no reason to believe that the lists are based on any authentic information about the Persian army; it is striking that of the twelve principal commanders named by Herodotus, not one is mentioned in the play.
5. *dwellers in the marshes*: Of the Nile delta.
6. *mainland*: Here this means (western) Asia Minor, which had once been controlled by the kingdom of Lydia and was now governed from that kingdom's former capital, Sardis, by a Persian satrap.
7. *with two poles and with three*: We are probably meant to assume that, as regularly in Homer, two horses are yoked to each pole, so that these are four- and six-horse chariots. Greeks (who in any case had long abandoned the use of chariots in war) never yoked more than two horses to a chariot, any extra horses being controlled by traces.
8. *Tmolus*: A mountain near Sardis.
9. *anvils of the spear*: That is, men who no more flinch before the

spear than an anvil flinches before the hammer.

10. *Mysia*: An inland region of north-western Asia Minor, lying north of Sardis, around the later famous city of Pergamum.
11. *city-sacking*: Greek *perseptolis*, the first of many puns linking the name of Persia with the verb *perthein* or *porthein* 'to sack, devastate'.
12. *strait of Helle*: That is, the Hellespont (now the Dardanelles).
13. *race begotten of gold*: Alluding to the conception of Perseus when Zeus visited his mother, Danaë, in the form of a shower of gold; the Persians were believed by Greeks to be descended from Perses, son of Perseus and Andromeda.
14. *trusting... army*: The first of many references to the bridge by which Xerxes' army crossed the Hellespont from Asia into Europe. The bridge was later destroyed by a storm, but its cables were captured by the Athenian admiral Xanthippus (whose son Pericles financed the production of *The Persians*) and taken to Athens, where they were hung in temples.
15. *projecting spur*: That is, the bridge, conceived as an artificial promontory which seems at one end like an extension of Asia, and at the other end like an extension of Europe.
16. *this ancient building*: The building was probably left to the audience's imagination, assisted by the presence of chairs.
17. *may make... the prosperity*: A metaphor from wrestling; the dust rises because the tripped man has fallen heavily, probably on his back.
18. *For those... defend it*: In other words, human and material resources are alike essential to the acquisition and maintenance of political power (cf. Sophocles, *Oedipus the King* 540–42), and a regime that is strong in only one of these respects may well be in danger.
19. *land of the Ionians*: The Persians and many other peoples of western Asia called all Greeks 'Ionians', doubtless because the first Greeks with whom they came into contact, those of Asia Minor, mostly belonged to the Ionian branch of the Greek people.
20. *in Doric robes*: This does not mean that the second woman is to be thought of as a Dorian Greek (a Spartan, say); both the 'Doric' and the 'Ionic' styles of dress were in use in contemporary Athens. Aeschylus doubtless chose the Doric style because it was the simpler of the two and would make a more effective contrast with Persian luxury.
21. *of the Orient*: Frequently in this play Persians speak of themselves as *barbaroi*, properly a Greek term for those who did not speak the Greek language; I have translated this throughout as 'Orient(al)' or 'Eastern(er)' (but in other plays, where the term is

used by Greeks, I have retained the traditional rendering 'barbarian').

22. *an eagle... altar of Phoebus*: The omen is easy to interpret: that the mother of the greatest of human kings, full of anxiety about his fate, sees the 'king of birds' (*Agamemnon* 114) fleeing from a bird of lesser status and submitting without resistance to degrading treatment, speaks for itself. It is less obvious why the eagle is represented as seeking the altar of Phoebus (Apollo) in particular; I suggest that the point is that the eagle is going *to the worst possible place* – for the eagle was the bird of Zeus, not Apollo, and the latter, though his best-known avian connection was with swans, also had one with hawks (*Iliad* 15.237; *Odyssey* 15.526; Aristophanes, *Birds* 516). Has Xerxes too gone to the most unpropitious place he could have chosen?
23. *he is not accountable to the community*: Unlike an Athenian general such as Miltiades, who not long after his victory at Marathon was nearly sentenced to death for failing to capture Paros, and eventually died in prison.
24. *Using my intelligence*: Rather than any divine inspiration, or any training in seer-craft.
25. *Medes*: The Medes and the Persians were actually distinct (though kindred) peoples, but in ordinary Greek usage, and in this play, the two names are treated as synonymous; what we call 'the Persian wars' Greeks normally called 'the Median affairs' (*ta Mēdika*).
26. *great deal of harm*: Referring mainly to the capture and burning of Sardis in 498, and the victory of Marathon in 490.
27. *treasure in their soil*: Referring to the silver mines of Laureium, where a rich new vein was discovered a few years before the Persian invasion – and exploited, by the advice of Themistocles, for the building of the fleet that won the battle of Salamis.
28. *The way this man runs*: This has been seen as a reference to the Persians' system of fast couriers (Aeschylus alludes to them at *Agamemnon* 282 – but they were mounted), or as a chauvinistic gibe, from a Greek point of view, at Persians' alleged cowardice (they run very fast – away from the enemy); more likely it is simply based on observation of the actual running styles of Greeks and Persians respectively. It would not be surprising if these styles tended to differ, given that Greek running techniques had been honed by many generations of athletic competition.
29. *this old life... too long*: That is, we wish we had not lived to hear this news.
30. *country of Zeus*: Hellen, the eponymous ancestor of the Hellenes (Greeks), was often said to have been a son of Zeus.

31. *shrouded in mantles that drift in the waves*: The Persians' luxurious garments have become their funeral robes – except that they will have no funerals.
32. *when I remember Athens*: This passage, and 824, suggest that the tale was already current of how, after the burning of Sardis, Darius ordered a slave to say to him thrice every day before dinner, 'Master, remember the Athenians' (Herodotus 5.105).
33. *how many... for nothing*: Referring mainly to Marathon (cf. 236, 244).
34. *Sileniae*: According to an ancient commentator, this name was given to a part of the coastline of Salamis near 'Trophy Point'. Probably the reference is to one side of the long peninsula of Cynosura at the eastern extremity of the island.
35. *Bactrians*: The region of Bactria corresponded roughly to what is now Tajikistan and northern Afghanistan.
36. *wanders*: As a floating corpse.
37. *the island where doves breed*: This may be another way of describing Salamis, or may designate a small island in its vicinity.
38. *Chrysa*: Possibly the town of this name near Troy is meant, or possibly the place name ('city of gold') is an invented one.
39. *purple dye*: That of blood.
40. *Lyrnaean*: This adjective should derive from a place name, Lyrna; ancient scholars knew of no such place and could only suggest that it was an abbreviated form of Lyrnessus near Troy (cf. note 38 above).
41. *Syennesis*: The only member of Xerxes' expedition named in the play, except the king himself, who can be firmly identified with an actual person. This 'name' was the title of all the kings of Cilicia (in south-eastern Asia Minor), and its contemporary bearer led the Cilician contingent of Xerxes' fleet (Herodotus 7.98).
42. *about three hundred ships*: Herodotus gives the total of the Greek fleet as 385, of which 180 were Athenian. The Persian Messenger cannot of course give an exact figure, and Aeschylus rounds down rather than up so as to maximize the disparity between the two fleets.
43. *those of outstanding speed... two hundred and seven*: The natural way of understanding this is to take the 207 extra-fast ships to be part of the total of a thousand, just as the ten ships of the Greek élite squadron are part of their total of three hundred. Herodotus seems to have read the passage otherwise, for he gives the total numbers of the Persian fleet, when it first reached Greece, as precisely 1,207; they suffered, however, according to his narrative, severe losses before Salamis (by storm, and in the

battle of Artemisium), and at Salamis they did not greatly outnumber the Greeks (8.13 – though in 8.66 he implausibly claims that the losses were made good by reinforcements from subjugated Greek states).

44. *Pallas: Athena.*

45. *While... secure:* This either alludes to, or else it inspired, the story of Themistocles' retort to the Corinthian Adeimantus at the Greek council of war which finally decided to stand and fight at Salamis. Adeimantus had tried to silence Themistocles, and prevent his proposal being put to a vote, because Themistocles was 'a man without a city', Attica having been evacuated by its population, its territory occupied by the Persians, and the city sacked and burned; to which Themistocles replied, 'We have a city and a country greater than yours, while we have two hundred ships and their crews' (Herodotus 8.61).

46. *A Greek man... Athenian fleet:* This was the slave Sicinnus, bringing a message from his master Themistocles (Herodotus 8.75).

47. *exits:* That is, the exits from the bay of Eleusis north of Salamis, especially the straits at the eastern end of the island (cf. Herodotus 8.76.1).

48. *surround the island... completely:* And, in particular, to watch the western exit from the bay, in the direction of Megara (*ibid.*).

49. *man-at-arms:* That is, a soldier serving as a marine.

50. *holy paean-song:* A type of hymn (originally to Apollo) customarily sung before battle and on various other occasions.

51. *as if they were tunny:* Tunny were caught in huge shoals, and, being a very large fish, had to be killed by clubbing or spearing after being netted.

52. *island in front of Salamis:* This was Psyttaleia, on which, according to Herodotus (8.76.1–2), Xerxes stationed 'many of the Persians' with the same objective as is stated here; they were killed to the last man by an Athenian hoplite force, led by Aristides, which crossed over from Salamis while the naval battle was in progress (Herodotus 8.95). In Aeschylus' treatment, on the other hand, the Greek attack on the island is made immediately *after* the naval battle, and by the same men who had fought it. Psyttaleia has been identified in modern times, sometimes with the island now officially so named (formerly Lipsokoutali) between Cynosura and the Peiraeus, sometimes with the island of Aghios Georghios in the bay north of Salamis town.

53. *haunt of Pan:* Pausanias, *Guide to Greece* 1.36.2, noted that there were many roughly carved wooden images of Pan on the island.

54. *The rest of the host:* That is, the land army. The following passage

traces their retreat northwards up the east coast of Greece and then eastwards through Macedonia and Thrace.

55. *Achaea*: Not Achaea in the northern Peloponnese but Achaea Phthiotis on the north shore of the Malian Gulf.
56. *Magnesia*: The north-eastern coastal region of Thessaly, dominated by Mt Ossa.
57. *river Axios*: Flows across Macedonia into the Thermaic Gulf; it marks approximately the point at which the Persians' line of march turned from north to east.
58. *Lake Bolbe*: Formed part of the boundary between the Chalcidic region to the south of it, with its Greek colonies, and the Macedonian kingdom.
59. *Mt Pangaeum*: Lies *east* of the Strymon, so the meaning must be that the army came *in sight* of it. The Strymon flows into the Aegean near Amphipolis.
60. *add some... suffered*: Probably to be taken as a guarded hint that she fears that Xerxes in his humiliation may commit suicide.
61. *dark-faced, equal-winged*: The ship's 'face' is her prow, possibly an allusion to the eyes so often painted on ships' bows; her 'wings' are her banks of oars.
62. *Cychreus*: A Salaminian hero; during the battle of Salamis he appeared to the Athenians in the form of a serpent (Pausanias, *Guide to Greece* 1.36.1).
63. *voiceless children... of the Undefined*: A 'kenning' denoting fish; the 'Undefined' is the sea, which washes away all ritual pollution and can never become polluted itself (cf. Euripides, *Iphigeneia in Tauris* 1193).
64. *pure*: That is, (probably) never yoked.
65. *flower-worker*: The bee.
66. *sweet-smelling produce*: Oil, rather than olives.
67. *King of the Shades*: Hades / Aidoneus / Pluto (who will be addressed by name at 650).
68. *Darian*: Since this form of the king's name is no closer than the regular Greek form *Dareios* to the Persian *Dārayavahush*, it may be based on the form used in some third language (of Asia Minor?); at any rate Aeschylus, in using it here and below, is clearly seeking to give the invocation a particularly exotic air.
69. *ballên*: This word for 'king' is not Persian but apparently comes from the Phrygian language of north-western Asia Minor (Pseudo-Plutarch, *On Rivers* 12.3–4); in Sophocles' *Shepherds*, whose setting is Troy, the Chorus use it in addressing (Priam or some other prince) (Sophocles fr. 515).
70. *your royal hat*: The Persian noble's headgear (*tiara* or *kyrbasia*) was a soft felt hat; the King wore a taller, stiffened, peaked

version.

71. *this... twin failure*: The loss of the fleet and of the land army.
72. *triple-oared ships*: That is, triremes (ships with three *banks* of oars).
73. *the mighty Bosphorus*: In poetry, the Hellespont was sometimes referred to as the Bosphorus, a name which properly, then as now, belonged to the other strait separating Europe from Asia, at Byzantium (Istanbul), some 240 km to the north-east.
74. *by the spear*: Apparently Darius mistakenly supposes that the land army was destroyed *in battle*.
75. *he altered the nature of its passage*: That is, he stopped up a sea-passage and created a land-passage instead.
76. *Medus*: Probably to be taken as the (mythical) eponymous founder of the kingdom of the Medes (cf. on 236). Alternatively *Mēdos* may mean ‘a Mede’; in that case the reference will be to Cyaxares (reigned c. 625–585), the first Median king to extend his rule into Asia Minor, and his son will be Astyages, the maternal grandfather of (and eventually deposed by) Cyrus.
77. *Cyrus*: The founder of the Persian Empire (which he ruled c. 550–529), the conqueror of Babylon, western Asia Minor and many other lands, and the first Middle Eastern monarch to rule over large numbers of Greeks. (He was also the father of Darius’ queen, Atossa, and the grandfather of Xerxes, but Aeschylus either was unaware of this or chose to ignore it.)
78. *The son of Cyrus*: Cambyses (reigned 529–522), the conqueror of Egypt; Herodotus, relying largely on Egyptian sources, gives a very unfavourable portrayal of him (3.1–38).
79. *Mardus*: In Herodotus (3.61–79) he is called Smerdis and is said to have been a usurper impersonating Cambyses’ brother of the same name (in Persian *Bardiya*); so too Darius himself in the Behistun inscription (sections 11–15; translated in M. Brosius, *The Persian Empire from Cyrus II to Artaxerxes I* (London 2000), pp. 23–4, 27–40) except that he calls the usurper Gaumata.
80. *Artaphrenes*: Herodotus (3.70ff.) calls this man Intaphrenes, which is considerably closer to the Persian *Vindafarnā*; evidently Aeschylus has confused him with a man much better known to Greeks, Darius’ brother, the governor of Sardis at the time of the Ionian revolt (Herodotus 5.25.1 etc.), whose son of the same name had been joint commander of the Persian forces at Marathon.
81. *I gained... I desired*: That is, we (either all the conspirators – so in effect Herodotus 3.84–8 – or Darius and Artaphrenes alone) drew lots for the kingship, and I won.
82. *the Asopus*: The principal river of Boeotia, which separates

Thebes from Plataea and Mt Cithaeron to the south. Aeschylus is here simplifying the course of events. Mardonius' army actually wintered further north, in Thessaly (Herodotus 8.113–35), and in the spring he advanced on Athens, which was captured and later burnt for the second time (Herodotus 9.1–3, 9.13.2); only when it was clear that Athens would not come to terms, and that the Spartans were on the march, did he retreat into Boeotia and prepare to meet the enemy there (Herodotus 9.12–15).

83. *shed by the Dorian spear*: It is worth noting that the entire credit for the victory of Plataea is here given to the Spartans.
84. *remember Athens*: Cf. on 285.
85. *river Halys*: Now the Kızılırmak, this river divides northern Asia Minor into an eastern and a western half, and had formerly been the boundary between the Median and Lydian empires.
86. *freshwater dwellings of the Thracians*: The lake-villages of the Strymon basin (cf. Herodotus 5.16), which were well known to Athenians in 472 because of Cimon's recent campaign on the lower Strymon, which included a large-scale clearance of the Thracians in the neighbourhood (Plutarch, *Cimon* 7.2).
87. *Propontis*: Now the Sea of Marmara; the most important Greek cities on its shores were Cyzicus on the Asian side and Perinthus on the European.
88. *this land*: Here means Asia as a whole.
89. *promontory that runs into the sea*: The Ionian peninsula, which has Chios to its west, Lesbos to its north and Samos to its south. The five other islands mentioned in this stanza are not covered by the description, being in the Cyclades group in the south-western Aegean.
90. *two shores*: Those of Europe and Asia; the lands 'midway between' them are the first two islands mentioned, Lemnos in the northern Aegean and Icaros in the southern.
91. *Salamis*: Salamis in Cyprus (on the east coast, north of modern Famagusta) was traditionally founded by Teucer, Ajax's half-brother, when he was banished from the other Salamis by his father after returning from the Trojan War without Ajax.
92. *The strength... aged citizens*: Because (i) there are virtually no young men left, (ii) he has been responsible for the death of so many, and (iii) some of the victims must be sons of the old men he is facing.
93. *Mariandynian dirge-singer*: The Mariandyni were a people of north-western Asia Minor (in the hinterland of the Greek colony of Heraclea Pontica), whose ritual laments were famous.
94. *your ever-faithful Eye*: Greeks believed that one of the high officials in the Persian administration was called 'the King's Eye'

(cf. Aristophanes, *Acharnians* 91–125; Herodotus 1.114.2). There is no evidence in Persian sources of the existence of such an official.

95. *who counted the numberless tens of thousands*: Possibly alluding to the story (Herodotus 7.60) of the Persian army being counted, ten thousand at a time, at Doriscus in Thrace.
96. *favourite son of Batanochus*: The man's own name is lost.
97. *ten thousand Mardians*: The Mardi were a nomadic Persian tribe (Herodotus 1.125.4).
98. *Arians*: Another Iranian people (Herodotus 7.66.1) living in what is now north-western Afghanistan (around Herat).
99. *wheeled tent*: That is, a carriage with curtains (the normal Greek word was *harmamaxa*), to Greeks an emblem of Persian luxury (cf. Aristophanes, *Acharnians* 70). On his westward march to Greece, Xerxes travelled sometimes in a chariot, sometimes in a *harmamaxa*, with 'a thousand of the noblest and bravest Persians' following him, together with other picked troops (Herodotus 7.41.1–2). The Persian elders had expected that he would return in similar style, with his carriage and his escort: he has come back with neither.
100. *black, violent blows*: Presumably to the head (cf. *The Libation-Bearers* 427–8), since Xerxes' next line shows that breast-beating has not yet been mentioned. The blows are 'black' because they will be delivered hard enough to raise bruises.
101. *Persian ground is hard to tread on*: Persia was thought of by Greeks as a land of rugged terrain (e.g. Herodotus 9.122); but why should the elders feel this specially now? Are they perhaps walking barefoot, having cast off their shoes as a further gesture of mourning? After this line, two lines have probably been lost, each of them beginning with yet another cry of woe.

THE PERSIAN WAR TETRALOGY

1. *The Persian War Tetralogy*: On possible connections with the Persian war (and the simultaneous Carthaginian war) in the first and third plays, see pp. 5–6.
2. *ankle-supports*: Greek *peplytra*, felt bandages which, according to an ancient lexicographer, 'were wrapped around the ankles and heels of runners to reduce the risk of dislocations'.
3. *First of all... good journey*: This passage (during or after which Glaucus presumably leaves the scene) is imitated by Aristophanes in the sendoff given to Dionysus and Aeschylus by the Chorus at

the end of *The Frogs* (1528–33), when they have been asked to ‘escort [Aeschylus] on his way, hymning his praises with his own lyrics and melodies’ (1525–7).

4. *its fair streams*: Those of the river Himeras, which flows past the city.
5. *Nysian delight*: That is, euphoria induced by wine (with reference to Mt Nysa, Dionysus’ childhood home).
6. *Naiads*: water-nymphs.
7. *like the best horses*: That is, white; for the excellence of white horses cf. Pindar, *Pythian* 9.83; [Euripides], *Rhesus* 616–21; and the epithet *leukippos* ‘of the white horses’ applied to many gods and heroes, especially Castor and Pollux.
8. *round drop*: Of boiling water, no doubt.
9. *He*: The name of the author from whom the Hesiod commentator cites this story has been lost, but the story certainly comes from a satyr drama, and Aeschylus is the only dramatist who is *known* to have written a satyr play involving Prometheus.
10. *Epimetheus*: Prometheus’ brother; whereas Prometheus means ‘Forethought’, Epimetheus means ‘Afterthought’.
11. *Staying... occasion*: This line is almost identical with *The Libation-Bearers* 582, and very similar to *Seven Against Thebes* 619.
12. *thirty thousand years*: In *Prometheus Bound* and *Unbound*, the duration of his bondage is much less, being equal to thirteen human generations (from Io to Heracles). The action of *Prometheus the Fire-Bearer* must be imagined as taking place *before* Prometheus’ arrest (since Pandora, the first mortal woman, has not yet, or has only just, been created), so Prometheus must have *predicted* his long ordeal. We cannot tell whether the prediction was meant to be taken as accurate or (as it well might be in a satyr drama) exaggerated; what the author of *Bound* and *Unbound* imagined (whether he was Aeschylus or another) is not decisive evidence of what Aeschylus imagined in an unconnected play.

SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

1. *Antigone... Herald*: These three characters were added to the play when the spurious ending was created.
2. *controlling the helm at its stern*: As often in poetry, the city is imaged as a ship.
3. *prophet*: Since this prophet is said to use his ‘ears and mind’, he evidently does not *see* the flight of the birds, and the audience

will readily identify him as the blind Teiresias.

4. *that shepherd of fowl*: So called, presumably, because he knows the birds as well as a shepherd does his flock.
5. *without using fire*: Contrasting divination by augury with divination from the manner in which sacrifices burn on an altar.
6. *Achaean*s: The enemy army are so called again at 324; elsewhere they are 'the Argives'.
7. *Enyo*: A war goddess, mentioned together with Ares in *Iliad* 5.592–4.
8. *adorning the chariot of Adrastus*: Adrastus, the king of Argos, is often himself said to have been one of the Seven (as in Euripides, *Phoenician Maidens* 1134); but he invariably survives the war, and Aeschylus evidently wanted to have all the Seven perish.
9. *mementos of themselves*: Probably locks of hair, as in several vase paintings of the early fifth century.
10. *I will keep... scout's eye out*: Implying that his first scouting expedition had been in darkness or at least twilight.
11. *O mighty Curse and Fury of my father*: The Furies (Erinyes) seem in early times to have been identified with curses, especially parental curses; cf. *Iliad* 9.454, 571; *Odyssey* 2.135; Hesiod, *Theogony* 472. In *Eumenides* 417 the Furies say that 'Curses' is their name in their homes beneath the earth.
12. *army... against the city*: The enemy infantry have now joined the cavalry (80–84) in the attack.
13. *I see the noise*: That is, it creates a vivid picture in my mind's eye.
14. *Ares, ancient god of this land*: Ares played a crucial role in the story of the founding of Thebes by Cadmus (the dragon that Cadmus slew and/or the spring which it guarded being sacred to him); he was the father of Cadmus' wife Harmonia.
15. *their crests at an angle*: The helmet-crests are 'nodding' as the warrior moves, a phenomenon that Homer formulaically calls 'fearsome' (e.g. *Iliad* 3.337). The expression is probably also designed to evoke the idea of waves breaking obliquely on the hull of a ship.
16. *lord of horses and ruler of the sea*: Poseidon.
17. *Cypris*: Aphrodite, who was the mother of Harmonia.
18. *Wolf-god*: Apollo's title *Lykeios* was popularly connected with *lykos* 'wolf', and Sophocles (*Electra* 6) calls him 'the wolf-slaying god'.
19. *maiden born of Leto*: Artemis.
20. *Child of Zeus*: Most likely Ares; hardly Athena, who is identified with Onca (164) at 487 and 501.
21. *clean*: Greek *hagnon* 'holy, pure, free of pollution', possibly hinting at a wish for the god to protect the lives of non-

combatants like themselves (the killing of enemies *in battle* did not count as homicide and involved no pollution).

22. *Onca, dwelling before the city*: The sanctuary of this local goddess was just outside one of the city gates (501–2).
23. *enemy of alien speech*: The enemy, of course, spoke Greek (though a different dialect or dialects), and worshipped the very same gods; but Aeschylus seems to be inviting the audience to compare Theban fears to their own when facing the Persian invasion of 480.
24. *gods of a captured city leave it*: The point seems to be that the gods will not defend a city that makes no real effort to defend itself.
25. *Saviour*: That is, Zeus (who had ‘Saviour’ (*Sōtēr*) as one of his most important cult titles). To the kind of family relationships here posited between Zeus and two personified abstractions there is a close parallel in a fourth-century inscription (*Inscriptiones Graecae* ii² 4627), a dedication ‘to Zeus Epiteleios Philios, and the god’s mother Philia [Friendship, Affection], and the god’s wife Agathe Tyche [Good Fortune]’.
26. *to offer slaughtered sacrifices to the gods*: The reference is to sacrifices (*sphagia*) offered immediately before going into battle. However, the fact that such sacrifices, in the nature of the case, could only be offered by men in no way shows that it was not proper for the women of a besieged city to offer collective sacrifice and prayer for its safety; Eteocles in effect concedes this at 265–70.
27. *You’re putting yourself into slavery*: That is, you are making defeat, and therefore your enslavement, more likely.
28. *while touching the images*: Words gained added force and effectiveness if their speaker was in contact with something sacred (a divine image, an altar, the parts of a sacrificial victim etc.), so *ill-omened* words uttered in such circumstances might be doubly damaging.
29. *that the gods should fight alongside us*: That is, do not speak as if the gods were to do all the fighting themselves.
30. *customary Hellenic cry at sacrifices*: The *ololygmos*, a cry of joy uttered (normally by women) at the slaughter of a sacrificial beast and on other occasions, often to hail a victory (e.g. *Agamemnon* 28, 1236; *The Libation-Bearers* 942).
31. *Dirce and... Ismenus*: The two rivers of Thebes (which, like all rivers, were worshipped as gods).
32. *to combat*: Literally ‘as rowers against’, another of the play’s ubiquitous nautical metaphors.
33. < >: The transmitted text means ‘in the big manner’, which gives no suitable sense; it is probably part of a note which

has displaced the original text.

34. *children of Tethys*: Tethys was the mother of all rivers (Hesiod, *Theogony* 337–45, 367–70).
35. *win glory for these citizens*: This paradoxical expression is based on *Iliad* 16.84, where Achilles, who is not going out to fight, tells Patroclus, who is, to ‘win glory for me’; similarly here the Chorus expect that the gods will do the work and the Thebans will get the credit.
36. *dragged by their hair like horses*: The comparison is to an unharnessed horse being led by its mane.
37. *those just reared*: Adolescent girls, forced to leave their homes prematurely as slave-concubines instead of leaving them in due time for a lawful marriage.
38. *as if by a solid wall*: This does not refer to the wall of the city itself; the enemy are envisaged as stationing troops to encircle the city after its capture and prevent the escape of survivors.
39. *having acquired unfriendly storekeepers*: The new ‘storekeepers’ of the grain are the enemy soldiers – who let it go to waste.
40. *prophet*: This must here mean Amphiaraus, of whom we will hear more later (568–619).
41. *snake hissing at midday*: Snakes were thought to be most active in the noonday heat.
42. *someone’s folly*: He means the folly of Tydeus in choosing such a device for his shield – but the words may eventually come to have an ironic application to himself.
43. *Sown Men whom Ares spared*: The ‘Sown Men’ were the warriors who sprang from the dragon’s teeth which Cadmus sowed in the soil of Thebes (hence ‘a man of this land through and through’) at the time when he founded the city; they fought each other (hence the reference to Ares) until only five remained, and these became the ancestors of the noblest families of Thebes. See [Apollodorus], *Library* 2.4.1.
44. *mother that bore him*: That is, the land of Thebes; cf. 16–20.
45. *giant*: Implying both ‘of great size’ and ‘an enemy of the gods’.
46. *bigger than the man previously mentioned*: Tydeus was a smallish man (*Iliad* 5.801).
47. *our first gain has given birth to yet another*: Meaning that the self-defeating arrogance of Capaneus augurs as well for the Thebans as did its predecessor, the self-defeating arrogance of Tydeus.
48. *thunderbolt*: Capaneus was killed by a thunderbolt from Zeus as he tried to scale the walls of Thebes. Cf. Sophocles, *Antigone* 127–37; Euripides, *Phoenician Maidens* 1172–86.
49. *Protectress*: Greek *Prostatēria*, a title associated with shrines placed close to doors or gates (cf. Sophocles, *Electra* 637);

Artemis and Hecate (who was sometimes partly or even wholly identified with her) were often worshipped at such spots. Probably there was a well-known sanctuary of Artemis under this title outside the Electran Gate of Thebes.

50. *bearing his boast in his hands*: That is, expressing his pride not in words but in action.
51. *Creon*: The same Creon (son of Menoeceus and brother of Iocaste) who figures in Sophocles' three Theban plays and in Euripides' *Phoenician Maidens*. In Sophocles, *Antigone* 1303–5, the death of Megareus is mentioned as if the audience would be familiar with the story, and it is implied that Creon was somehow responsible for it; Aeschylus is evidently not following that version (whatever precisely it was), but it is striking that Megareus is the only one of the defending champions (other than himself) whose death Eteocles mentions as a possibility (477).
52. *two men*: Viz. Eteocles himself and the man portrayed on his shield.
53. *Brag about another one*: Eteocles speaks as if the Scout were himself making the boasts that he reports the attackers are making.
54. *Typhon*: Typhon, also called Typhoeus or Typhos, was the last opponent whom Zeus vanquished before his rulership of the universe was finally established (Hesiod, *Theogony* 821–68). He was an earth-born monster, with a hundred fiery serpent-heads, but after a great battle Zeus defeated him with the thunderbolt and hurled him down to Tartarus (in Pindar, *Pythian* 1.15–28, and in *Prometheus Bound* 351–72, he lies under Mt Etna).
55. *round circle... coiling snakes*: This expression is easily understood in the light of artistic representations of Typhon (including an Argive shield found at Olympia), in which he regularly has one or two coiling snakes where his legs should be.
56. *maenad*: An ecstatic female worshipper of Dionysus.
57. *Hermes*: Thought to be responsible for unexpected strokes of good luck.
58. *man is an enemy of the man he will face*: It is not clear whether this means that the two men are personal enemies (if so, we know nothing of the mythical background) or whether the statement merely serves to point up what follows ('not only are these two men going to fight each other, they also bear on their shields two gods who fought each other').
59. *his Saviour*: Alluding to one of Zeus' most familiar titles; cf. on 225.
60. *Amphion*: Together with his brother Zethus, Amphion built the walls of Thebes. His tomb was on a hill to the north of the

Cadmea.

61. *his maidenish name: Partheno-paeus.*
62. *offspring of Ares by a mountain-dwelling mother:* Parthenopaeus' mother was the huntress Atalanta. His father is usually named as Melanion (occasionally Meleager), but [Apollodorus], *Library* 3.9.2 gives Ares as an alternative.
63. *so that... at that man:* When the Thebans throw their spears at Parthenopaeus, they risk hitting the Theban on his shield – a bad omen for their side.
64. *immigrant... his fine upbringing:* This remark may be a later interpolation: if Parthenopaeus has travelled further than his colleagues to fight at Thebes (545–6), he can hardly have been brought up at Argos as here implied.
65. *to flood in through the gates:* The ship image again.
66. *'murderer':* Tydeus had fled from his native Calydon to Argos after killing one or more kinsmen (early accounts vary widely as to the details); like Polyneices, he married a daughter of Adrastus. Amphiarus' ensuing words should not be taken to imply that Tydeus alone was the prime mover behind Adrastus' decision to attack Thebes, since he also blames Polyneices for urging this course on Adrastus (585).
67. *'arouser of a Fury':* That is, inciter of an act that will incur certain and terrible vengeance.
68. *turning... its significance:* Polyneices means 'Much-strife'. The passage as transmitted is corrupt, and I suspect that several words that were originally annotations (including Polyneices' name) have been incorporated into the text; I have omitted these in the translation.
69. *becoming a prophet... soil of the enemy:* The oracular shrine of Amphiarus near Thebes was famous throughout, and beyond, the Greek world (Herodotus 1.46, 49, 52; 8.134).
70. *for he desires not... good counsels grow:* Plutarch (*Aristides* 3.5) says that on hearing this eulogy of Amphiarus in the theatre, the whole audience turned their eyes to Aristides 'the Just'; but his anecdote derives much of its point from a misquotation (making Amphiarus desire not the appearance but the reality of *justice* – appropriate to Aristides but not to the Aeschylean context) and should be regarded as fictional.
71. *against his will:* Amphiarus' wife Eriphyle was the sister of Adrastus; after an earlier quarrel with Adrastus, Amphiarus had sworn that in any future dispute between the two men he would abide by her decision. When he was reluctant to join the expedition against Thebes (knowing through his prophetic power that it was doomed to disaster), Polyneices bribed Eriphyle with

the necklace of Harmonia, and she, invoking Amphiarus' oath, instructed him to go on the expedition. The story was known in some form to Homer (*Odyssey* 11.326–7, 15.244–7); it is told consecutively by an ancient commentator on *Odyssey* 11.326.

72. *road on which it's a long journey to come back*: That is, the road to death.
73. *Loxias*: Apollo.
74. *Seventh Gate*: Both Aeschylus and Euripides (*Phoenician Maidens* 1104–40), in listing the Seven and the gates they attacked, give names to the first six gates but call the last simply 'the seventh'. For Euripides this gate is of no particular importance (in his account no one is killed there), and he clearly regarded 'Seventh' as its *name*. In [Apollodorus], *Library* 3.6.6, and Pausanias, *Guide to Greece* 9.8.4, what seems to be the same gate is called the Hypsistan; if 'Seventh' was an alternative name for it, it may have been due to the presence nearby of a sanctuary of Apollo (cf. 800–801).
75. *what a fate... this city*: Polyneices actually wants to rule Thebes (647–8), not to destroy it, and even expects its gods to be his allies (639–41); but the Scout, like Amphiarus (582–3), evidently assumes that if the enemy are victorious Polyneices will not be able to prevent them from sacking and burning the city (cf. 427, 434, 467, 531, 549).
76. *command*: Lit. 'be ship-captain of'.
77. *this man so well named*: See on 577.
78. *such blood purifies itself*: Normally anyone who shed another's blood, intentionally or not, became ritually polluted, but this did not apply to the killing of an enemy in war (Euripides, *Ion* 1334; Plato, *Laws* 869d).
79. *child*: Compared with their earlier exchanges (180–286), the reversal in the positions of Eteocles and the Chorus is so complete that the young maidens even speak to him as if his superiors in age and wisdom.
80. *Cocytus*: One of the rivers of Hades.
81. *with dry, tearless eyes*: That is, without pity.
82. *dream-visions... our father's property*: This may refer back to something said by Eteocles in the preceding play, *Oedipus*; if it does not, its meaning will have been mysterious to many if not most of the audience until elucidated by 727–33 (cf. 788–90, 816–19, 906–9, 941–50).
83. *Chalybian migrant from Scythia*: The Chalybians were famous as iron-workers (*Prometheus Bound* 714–15; Euripides, *Alcestis* 980–1). They are usually located in Asia Minor (e.g. Herodotus 1.28) rather than in Scythia (the region north of the Black Sea), but the

early fifth-century geographer Hecataeus placed them north of the Armenians, and in *Prometheus Bound* they live between the ‘Scythian nomads’ and the Caucasus.

84. *as much as is given to the dead to possess*: That is, just enough for a grave.
85. *who can release them*: From pollution.
86. *who had told him thrice*: Presumably we are to understand that Laius, being dissatisfied with Apollo’s response, repeated his question twice, only to receive the same answer each time; cf. Herodotus 7.141, where the Athenians force Apollo to modify his response by threatening an indefinite hunger strike in the temple.
87. *bridal couple*: The bridegroom here is probably Laius rather than Oedipus: Oedipus had no way of knowing that he was marrying his mother (cf. 778–9; the story of his having been told by Apollo that he was destined to do so is unlikely to predate Sophocles), and ‘mindless madness’ describes not inappropriately an act by Laius which has already been called ill-counselled, a transgression and a defiance of Apollo.
88. *grievous reconciliation... long ago*: This too (cf. 710–11) may refer to something said in *Oedipus*; for the idea of the brothers’ death as their reconciliation, cf. 884–5, 908–9, 941.
89. *their shared abode*: Either their joint sanctuary on the Theban acropolis (cf. 93–281) or the palace of Zeus on Olympus where the gods of the *Iliad* regularly assemble.
90. *by the much-trodden meeting place of mortals*: That is, by (those who frequented) the assembly place (*agora*) of Thebes.
91. *man-snatching demon*: The Sphinx.
92. *he was robbed of his < > eyes*: The transmitted text describes his eyes as *kreissoteknōn*, which could conceivably mean ‘better than children’ but is a word of impossible formation; no proposed correction is convincing.
93. *their wretched maintenance of him*: Possibly referring to the story in the epic *Thebais* (fr. 3 West) that Oedipus cursed his sons when they insulted him by sending him an inferior cut of meat from a sacrifice.
94. *awesome Master of Sevens*: This title (*hebdomagetas*, lit. ‘seventh-leader’) is probably an ad hoc coinage; the number seven was sacred to Apollo because he was born on the seventh day of the month.
95. *< >*: The lost line spoken by the Messenger may have meant something like ‘not hesitating to fight each other’; the Chorus will have interjected another anxious, impatient or horrified comment.
96. *O great Zeus... impious thoughts*: Abnormalities of language, metre

and sense make it unlikely that Aeschylus was responsible for these lines.

97. *with 'true glory' and with 'much strife'*: The etymological meanings of the names Eteocles and Polyneices respectively.
98. *regular beating of hands on head*: Head-beating, a common gesture of mourning, is here compared to the rhythmic beat of a ship's oars.
99. *Acheron*: The river, or lake, in the underworld, across which Charon was usually imagined as ferrying the souls of the dead. In the picture created here, it is the words and actions of the mourners that provide the motive power to take souls across the water on that final journey.
100. *sacred mission... no return*: Alluding to the sacred ship sent annually by the Athenians to Delos in honour of Apollo, in commemoration, it was said, of the ship that Aegeus sent to Crete with seven youths and seven maidens, destined as a tribute for the Minotaur, whom Theseus rescued (cf. Plato, *Phaedo* 58a–c). On the return voyage Theseus forgot to change the black sail for a red or white one, so that Aegeus thought he was dead and committed suicide. The ship of the dead *always* has black sails.
101. *on which Apollo Paeon never treads*: Mourning was abhorrent to Apollo (*Agamemnon* 1074–9).
102. *But here come... from the heart*: This passage was inserted, for the purpose of bringing Antigone and Ismene on stage, at the time when the end of the play was reshaped.
103. *first semichorus*: At certain points (877, 895, 933) the text makes it clear that this lament is sung by two (groups of) voices in alternation, and many manuscripts mark the change points fairly regularly (though none marks them all). Except at one point (933, where most name the singer as Ismene), they assign the lines to 'Semichorus' or 'Chorus'.
104. *their reconciler*: Iron (cf. 727–33, 816–17, 884–5, 941–3).
105. *Unhappy is she... mothers of children*: This does not in itself imply that the mother is still alive.
106. *parting*: Greek *diatomais*, lit. 'cuttings-apart', alluding (i) to the anticipated friendly parting of Hector and Ajax after their duel at Troy (*Iliad* 7.302, using the related word *dietmagen*), (ii) to the division of Oedipus' inheritance, and (iii) to the wounds the brothers inflicted on each other.
107. *from the sea*: (Greek *pontios*), or 'from the Black Sea' (Greek *Pontios*).
108. *under their bodies... wealth of land*: I.e. the real estate they will receive, though in length and breadth it is only so much as suffices for a grave, is of infinite *depth*!

109. *Curses*: Equivalent to 'Furies' (cf. 70). For the battle at the gates between the Thebans and the Argives there is substituted, in these lines, a battle between the House of Laius and the powers of destruction (the Curses, Ruin and the *daimōn* or 'controlling power') ending in decisive victory for the latter.
110. *You struck... where he does*: These brief responsive phrases may have been sung by individual voices from the two halves of the Chorus. In the manuscripts they are mostly ascribed to Antigone and Ismene, and this was doubtless the intention of the producer who introduced these characters.
111. *You struck after being struck. – You were killed after killing*: This implies a scenario like that narrated in Euripides, *Phoenician Maidens* 1404–22: brother A gives brother B a mortal wound, but B with his last strength kills A.
112. *He did not come back... killed*: This probably refers to Eteocles, who had gone out of the city to fight his brother; in the next line the reference is to Polyneices' return from Argos.
113. *thrice-hurled*: Greek *tripalta* (which occurs only here) ought etymologically to mean something like 'thrice brandished', referring to a weapon; it may possibly refer to the three generations of suffering in the House of Laius (cf. 742ff.), which have been enacted in the three plays of the trilogy.
114. *You know about it*: That is, about the power of the Fury.
115. *and the land*: After this, in the transmitted text, come two lines which are appropriate only to Antigone and Ismene: 'But above all to me. – And even more to me.' They will have been inserted when the sisters were brought into the play; evidently (and rightly) the adaptor felt that it would be absurd to have them sing a sobbing antiphon like 961–1004 and yet make no reference whatever to their personal grief.
116. *pain... where he does*: The language irresistibly suggests that to bury Eteocles and Polyneices close to their father would be to inflict on him the same kind of injury that he inflicted on *his* father (to whom he gave pain, and whose bed he unknowingly usurped). Since the first suggestion as to where the brothers should be buried has thus been (at least provisionally) rejected, Aeschylus' text cannot have ended here: once the question of their burial place has been raised, the bodies cannot be taken off until it has been settled.
117. *I have to announce... city of Cadmus*: The remainder of the text, from this point on, is not by Aeschylus; see pp. 63–4
118. *carrying it*: The text does not make it clear what she will be carrying (strictly interpreted, indeed, it ought to mean she will be carrying the body itself!), but the writer expected his audience to

understand that she would bring earth to throw over the body (cf. Sophocles, *Antigone* 249–56).

119. *Keres, Furies*: The Keres are usually spirits of death and evil, distinct from the Furies, who are spirits of vengeance; however, in Hesiod, *Theogony* 217–22, the Keres are presented as spirits of vengeance, and Aeschylus in *Eumenides* gives his Furies the same pedigree (as children of Night with no father) that Hesiod gives the Keres.

THE THEBAN TETRALOGY

1. *And for the stranger a garland*: Linguistic details show that this reward for ‘the stranger’ (Oedipus) is being contrasted with another reward which has apparently just been proposed for someone else. Is the speaker Silenus, suggesting to Creon that Oedipus should be given a token reward while he himself should get the substantive one (presumably the kingship of Thebes and the hand of Iocaste)?
2. *according to the tale of Prometheus*: For the connection between Prometheus, bonds and garlands, see *Prometheus Unbound* fr. 202. Since the Prometheus plays, whether by Aeschylus or not, are almost certainly later than *The Sphinx*, our fragment shows that this aetiology is of pre-Aeschylean origin.
3. *The Sphinx... ill-fortune*: This phrase is quoted by ‘Euripides’ in a parody of Aeschylean lyric in Aristophanes, *Frogs* 1287. The ancient commentator on that passage explicitly ascribes the words to *The Sphinx*, in which the most plausible place for them would be in a retrospective song after the monster’s destruction; but it has also been suggested that the ascription is erroneous and that the line actually came from *Oedipus*.
4. *bitch*: The Sphinx is called a dog because she snatched up her prey; so in *Seven Against Thebes* (776–7) she is ‘the man-snatching demon’, and in Sophocles’ *Oedipus the King* (391) ‘the songstress-bitch’.

THE SUPPLIANTS

1. *land of Zeus*: Egypt could be so called because it contained the famous oracle of Zeus Ammon at Siwa; but to the Danaids it is more important that Egypt was the place where Zeus

miraculously begot their ancestor Epaphus.

2. *leader of our band*: Greek *stasiarkhos* is also capable of meaning ‘originator of civil strife’ – which Danaus may have been in Egypt and may later prove to be in Argos (see pp. 152–5).
3. *like a gameboard*: The game referred to is one of those that went under the generic name *pestoi*, games of mixed skill and chance based on the moving of pieces on a board according to the fall of dice.
4. *gadfly-driven heifer*: Io.
5. *hand-held emblems*: Greek *enkheiridiois* more usually means ‘daggers’ – which the Danaids will be using later in the trilogy.
6. *and, thirdly, Zeus the Saviour*: The third libation after a meal was poured to Zeus the Saviour (the first going to the Olympian gods, the second to the heroes), and Aeschylus is fond of linking Zeus the Saviour with the number three (e.g. *Agamemnon* 245–7, 1386–7; *The Libation-Bearers* 1075–6; *Eumenides* 759–60).
7. *the vindicator*: In the sense that Argive recognition that Epaphus was the Danaids’ ancestor will compel them to respect the Danaids’ claim to Argive aid.
8. *touch*: Greek *ephapsis* (in line 17 it was *epaphē*), whence the child’s name Epaphus.
9. *and the destined time... derived from that touch*: If the text here is rightly restored and understood, it implies that at the time of Epaphus’ conception Zeus told Io (as Gabriel told Mary) what name should be given to the child she would bear.
10. *Tereus’ wife... misery*: The wife of Tereus (with or without the aid of her sister) killed their only child, Itys, and tricked his father into eating his flesh. In early versions of the story, the killing may have been accidental (as in the parallel story of *Odyssey* 19.518–23, where the husband is Zethus); in Sophocles’ later *Tereus* it is a deliberate act of revenge for Tereus’ rape of his wife’s sister; in our passage it could be either. Both husband and wife were transformed into birds, the latter into a nightingale (who continues eternally to lament for Itys), the former into a hawk (in Sophocles a hoopoe). The wife’s name in archaic art, and in the mythographer Pherecydes (a contemporary of Aeschylus), is Aëdon or Aëdona (‘Nightingale’); in Sophocles and later Greek authors it is Procne.
11. *her unmotherly anger*: If for Aeschylus the killing of Itys was deliberate, the object of his mother’s anger will have been Tereus; if accidental, then probably (as in Pherecydes) the mother’s (jealous) anger will have been directed against her prolific sister-in-law Niobe (she killed Itys by mistake for one of Niobe’s sons).

12. *lamenting in Ionian strains*: The Ionian musical mode was particularly associated with laments.
13. *Land of Mists*: A name for Egypt (Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica* 4.267), said to refer to the mist that often concealed its low-lying coastline from the approaching seafarer.
14. *Even for distressed fugitives... that gods respect*: Fugitives from war, whose enemies are only trying to assert the accepted rights of the victor, are safe from seizure if they take sanctuary at an altar: how much more should the Danaids be protected, since their enemies are trying to claim something to which (according to the Danaids) they have no right whatsoever!
15. *It falls safe, not on its back*: H. Friis Johansen and E. W. Whittle, in their commentary (Copenhagen 1980), plausibly take the metaphor to refer to a leopard (or feline predator of similar habits) springing from a tree and landing on its feet – appropriate here, where the stress is on Zeus' power to punish and destroy.
16. *Everything gods do... holy abode*: Cf. Xenophanes fr. 25, 26 Diels-Kranz: '[God] moves everything by mental will, without toil... He always remains in one place, without moving at all.'
17. *the kind of youthful stock that is sprouting*: The 'youthful stock' consists of the sons of Aegyptus.
18. *hilly land of Apia*: Apia was a name for Argos (cf. *Agamemnon* 256–7), explained in 260–70; by its similarity to the name of Apis, the Egyptian bull god sometimes identified with Epaphus (cf. Herodotus 2.153), it suggests a link between Argos and Egypt, just as *bounis* 'hilly land' suggests a link with the bovine Io.
19. *you understand well... my barbaric speech*: Although, in accordance with the conventions of tragedy, the words that actually come out of the Danaids' mouths are Greek, we are expected to imagine that they are speaking Egyptian (just as e.g. we are expected to imagine that the performers' linen masks are human faces).
20. *Sidonian*: That is, Phoenician; perhaps suggesting 'richly coloured'; cf. *Iliad* 6.289–90.
21. *tearing its linen to rags*: A gesture of mourning or grief; cf. *The Libation-Bearers* 27–8.
22. *rites*: Greek *telea*, a word which in appropriate contexts often refers specifically to marriage or its consummation (e.g. *Eumenides* 835; Sophocles, *Antigone* 1240–41; cf. *proteleia* 'prenuptial sacrifices').
23. *are vulnerable... so long as death keeps away*: That is, our self-mourning (116) is premature: if we do not abandon life, there is hope that the gods may save us from the fate we fear.

24. *flax-sewn house of wood*: a poetic kenning for 'ship'; 'flax-sewn' apparently refers to the stitching together of hull timbers, a common practice in south-west Asia and thought by later writers to have been referred to in certain Homeric passages (*Iliad* 2.135; *Odyssey* 14.383).
25. *most august mother*: Io.
26. *chaste daughter of Zeus*: Artemis.
27. *with a willingness matching mine*: Artemis' willingness to protect the Danaids will match their willingness to have her do so.
28. *she who dwells... façades*: The point is: Artemis' virginity is safe from all attack; ours is not; therefore let her protect us!
29. *untamed ones*: The virgin female was often imaged as a wild animal, and marriage as taming, breaking-in or yoking.
30. *the ever-hospitable Zeus of the departed*: Hades-Pluto; cf. 230–31; *Agamemnon* 1386–7; *Iliad* 9.457.
31. *after a stiff wind a storm will come*: The Danaids fear that Hera may yet vent her hatred of Io on Io's descendants. In the end this may have happened in an unexpected way (note the linking of Hera with Aphrodite in 1034–5).
32. *Assembled Gods*: Outside this play, this term (Greek *agōnioi theoi*) is found only at *Agamemnon* 513 (also referring to Argos) and Plato, *Laws* 783a; it appears to refer to a common cult of all the major Olympians (cf. 222), like that of the 'Twelve Gods' in the Agora at Athens.
33. *in your left hands*: The *right* hand of the suppliant is the one with which (s)he clings to an altar or image, or attempts to touch the person being supplicated (cf. e.g. Euripides, *Children of Heracles* 844).
34. *enforcer of respect*: That is, the god who demands that suppliants be treated with respect.
35. *bird of Zeus*: The image of Zeus apparently has an eagle perching on its head or hand (cf. Aristophanes, *Birds* 514–15); the Egyptian god Amun-Re, whom Greeks identified with Zeus, was often portrayed as, or with the head of, a hawk which represented the sun. Aeschylus and his audience evidently knew about the Egyptian sun-bird, and may well have been misled by the identification of Amun-Re with Zeus into supposing that the bird was an eagle: indeed later sources (Diodorus Siculus, *Historical Library* 1.87.9; Strabo, *Geography* 17.1.40) say that in Egyptian Thebes (the greatest centre of Amun's cult) the eagle was worshipped.
36. *god exiled from heaven*: For killing the Cyclopes, Apollo was sentenced to a period of servitude on earth, during which he herded the cattle of Admetus (Euripides, *Alcestis* 1–8).

37. *symbol of a god*: The god is Poseidon.
38. *Hermes, according to the Greeks' usage*: Greeks identified the Egyptian god Thoth with their own Hermes. Danaus means that the image he sees is the Greek way of representing the god he knows as Thoth, but since by convention he is made to speak Greek (cf. on 119), he says not 'Thoth' but 'Hermes' – just as Latin writers quoting or inventing the words of Greeks make them speak of Hermes as *Mercurius*.
39. *May we receive proclamations... from him*: In his capacity as the divine Herald.
40. *native sponsors*: Greek *proxenoi*, citizens of one state (State A) who were recognized by another state (State B) as standing in a relationship of guest-friendship with State B as a community, and who could normally be relied on to render assistance to citizens of State B residing in, or visiting, State A.
41. *only in that respect... reasonable guess*: A clumsy way (even clumsier in the original) of saying, 'That's the only thing about you that seems Greek.'
42. *how should I address you... the leader of the city*: This is in effect a counter-question about Pelasgus' attire, which (despite his sceptre, which the Danaids think may be a 'sacred staff') is evidently too plain, by their standards, for them to be sure that he is a king.
43. *master of all the land*: Pelasgus' kingdom, as here described, covers almost the whole of modern Greece, extending well beyond the regions inhabited by Greeks in Aeschylus' time.
44. *on the side of the setting sun*: That is, to the west of the river.
45. *Paeonians*: A non-Greek tribe living in western Thrace and eastern Macedonia.
46. *Perrhaebians*: In the fifth century Perrhaebia was the name of a district in north-eastern Thessaly (Herodotus 7.128.1; Thucydides 4.78.5–6); but in the *Iliad* (2.749–50) the Per(rh)aebi live 'near Dodona', and Sophocles (fr. 271) places them near Mounts Pindus and Lacmus, which separate Thessaly on the east from Epirus on the west and in which rise tributaries of those regions' major rivers, the Peneus and the Achelous respectively.
47. *Dodona*: The famous oracle of Zeus in the north-west of Greece (about 14 km south of modern Ioannina).
48. *land of Naupactus across the sea*: On the north side of the Corinthian Gulf, near its western end.
49. *our city does not love long speeches*: The Argives, as well as the Spartans, had a reputation for brevity of speech; cf. Pindar, *Isthmian* 6.58–9; Sophocles fr. 64.
50. *similar stamp... by male artificers*: That is, Cyprian fathers,

impregnating Cyprian mothers, procreate children whom you resemble.

51. *in India, near neighbours to the Ethiopians*: Greeks gave the name *Aithiopes* not only to the black peoples of inner Africa but also to a people whom they called the 'eastern Ethiopians', straight-haired and living near the Indians (Herodotus 7.70). In *Prometheus Bound* 808–9 the two seem to be identified, as if there were continuous land linking south Asia directly to the upper Nile.
52. *keyholder*: That is, priestess.
53. *royal pair*: Zeus and Hera.
54. *watchman who could see everything*: Because he had eyes all over his body (as often portrayed in contemporary art).
55. *oistros*: A Greek, not an Egyptian, word; cf. on 119 and 220.
56. *Canobus and Memphis*: Canobus was a town at one of the mouths of the Nile, just east of what was to become the site of Alexandria; in *Prometheus Bound* 846–9 it is prophesied that Io's wanderings will end there. Memphis, the ancient capital of Egypt, was further inland, a little south of modern Cairo.
57. *vast <portion> of land*: Presumably the whole of Africa, for the continent took its Greek name from her.
58. *are you talking about something wrongful*: That is, are you saying that the Aegyptiads are demanding something to which they have no lawful right?
59. *Who would love... as an owner*: For this equation of marriage with slavery cf. Euripides, *Medea* 232–4: '... we have to buy a husband at a high price and take him as absolute master of our person.'
60. *That is how people increase their strength*: The Danaids have in effect rejected the principle of Greek social organization that marriage is the transfer of a woman, object-like, from one family to another; Pelasgus replies with the conventional wisdom – that arranged marriages enable families to build up alliances and strengthen their social position.
61. *when they fall... got rid of*: That is, a marriage alliance between two families gives no security to the weaker, since the stronger can easily repudiate it.
62. *poop... garlanded as it is*: The poop, where the steersman stood, was the most vital part of the ship (cf. *Seven* 2); and this shrine, claim the Danaids, is the most vital spot in Argos – all the more so now it has been 'garlanded' with their suppliant-boughs. There is an allusion to the garlanding of the sterns of ships on sacred missions (cf. Plato, *Phaedo* 58a–c).
63. *in shadow*: Cf. 354–5.
64. *citizen-strangers*: The Danaids are foreigners by birth and

appearance but citizens by descent.

65. *servant*: Or 'daughter'; the Greek text merely describes Right (Themis) as 'of Zeus'.
66. *Zeus Klarios*: This title of Zeus is otherwise known only from Tegea (Pausanias, *Guide to Greece* 8.53.9), where, perhaps significantly, it is associated with 'the elevated place on which stand most of the Tegeans' altars'.
67. *You are not sitting at the hearth of my house*: In other words, by taking sanctuary at a public shrine, the Danaids have made themselves supplicants, not to the individual Pelasgus but to the Argive state.
68. *If the sons... your nearest kin*: That is, if it is the case that under Egyptian law a man is entitled as of right to demand a woman in marriage if he is her nearest kinsman. By evading an answer to this point, the Danaids virtually admit that this is indeed the legal position.
69. *neither may Battle seize her booty*: This 'booty' will consist in Argive lives and possibly the city itself (cf. 401).
70. *sponsor*: Greek *proxenos* (cf. on 239).
71. *impious expulsion*: Elsewhere in the play the Danaids make it quite clear that they fled from Egypt by their own and/or their father's choice; it is an 'expulsion' only in the sense that they could not have remained there without accepting the marriages they abhor.
72. *either against these or against those*: Either against the gods or against the sons of Aegyptus.
73. *only restraining cables... at the shore*: The ship represents Pelasgus' decision, and its launching, now imminent, represents the moment when that decision will become irrevocable and its consequences unavoidable. The construction of the hull is now complete, but the vessel is still attached by cables to a windlass on shore; once the cables are let go, the ship will be waterborne.
74. *that kindred blood shall not be spilt*: At first sight a surprising thing for Pelasgus to say, since the only bloodshed he currently fears is that of a war between Argos and Egypt. The likeliest explanation is that he is implying that in asking him to fight a war on their behalf against their cousins, the Danaids are in effect seeking to commit kindred-murder by proxy. He again stresses the kinship of the two hostile families at 474.
75. *pollution terrible beyond compare*: The pollution which the Danaids' dead bodies would bring upon the shrine.
76. *Inachus*: The principal river of Argos.
77. *in case confidence gives birth to fear*: Danaus' apprehension is that if Pelasgus is overconfident of Danaus' safety, and so fails to

provide him with adequate protection, the result may be that Danaus finds himself in fear of his life.

78. *through ignorance*: That is, mistaking him for an enemy: Danaus fears the Argives may take *him* for an enemy because of his alien appearance.
79. *you must not be talkative... at the gods' hearth*: Plainly implying that he wants the escorts to say nothing about Danaus except that he is a suppliant – which will be obvious anyway from the boughs. Pelasgus does not wish any further information about the affair to become public until he presents it himself at the forthcoming assembly meeting.
80. *move down to this level meadow*: That is, leave the mound and descend to the *orchestra*.
81. *May you speak... spoken to you*: That is, 'Please follow my example and avoid speaking words of bad omen.'
82. *where my mother was watched*: By Argus; cf. 303–5.
83. *she cleaved the waves... on its distant side*: The strait (*poros*) across which Io swam came to be called the Bosporus ('Strait of the Cow') in memory of her passage, and regarded as the boundary between Europe and Asia.
84. *Mysian city of Teuthras*: For Mysia, see on *Persians* 53; the city's name was Teuthrania.
85. *speeding across the land of the Pamphylians*: In classical times the part of southern Asia Minor called Pamphylia lay well to the west of Cilicia, and Io would have come to it first; but Sophocles too (fr. 180a) applied the name Pamphylia to (part of) the later Cilicia.
86. *land of Aphrodite*: Phoenicia and Palestine, famous for the worship of Astarte (equated by Greeks with Aphrodite).
87. *plain of Zeus*: Egypt (or perhaps, more specifically, the Nile delta); cf. 4–5.
88. *snow-fed meads*: It was believed that the Nile's floods were fed by melting mountain snow.
89. *untouched by the plagues of Typhos*: That is, free from storms: Typhos (see on *Seven* 493) was father of the storm winds (Hesiod, *Theogony* 869–80).
90. *maenad of Hera*: That is, driven into frenzy by Hera as bacchic maenads are by Dionysus.
91. *green fear*: The pallor of intense fear was thought to be caused by a flow of bile; cf. *The Libation-Bearers* 183–4; Theocritus 23.13.
92. *<Zeus, who restrained her with his hand>*: Another supplement that has been suggested is '<Zeus, who released her from her suffering>'.
93. *she was stopped*: In other words, from her mad rushing; the

following words further imply that Zeus' touch changed her back into fully human form.

94. *Zeus who grants fair winds*: He gave fair winds, literally, to speed the voyage from Egypt to Argos (134–7), and the Danaids hope he will give fair winds, figuratively, to see them safe hereafter.
95. *with no divided voice*: That is, the vote was unanimous.
96. *their aptly named right hands*: The point is probably that *dexios* 'of the right hand' also has the meanings 'of good omen' and 'intelligent'.
97. *in relation both to foreigners and to citizens*: Because the Danaids can be viewed either as foreigners or as Argives (cf. 356).
98. *without waiting to be called*: That is, before the herald could say, 'All those in favour raise their hands.'
99. *my kin*: That is, the Argives.
100. *in fields that are not arable*: Lit. 'in other fields' (than those in which ordinary harvests are reaped).
101. *Zeus' avenger*: A being similar, or perhaps identical, to the 'god of Vengeance' mentioned at 415. Here he is pictured as a bird who perches on the roof of a house and brings a curse on it.
102. *our shaded lips*: Probably referring to their veils (cf. 122).
103. *sacred hearths where they gather*: The reference is to altars at the city's *bouleutērion* where its council of elders would meet.
104. *Artemis Hecate*: One of the functions of Artemis was to protect women in childbirth (cf. Euripides, *Hippolytus* 166–9). From the fifth century onwards, Hecate, originally a distinct goddess, was often identified with Artemis; the relevance of such an identification here may be that one of Hecate's roles was as a 'nurturer of boys' (*kourotrophos*; cf. Hesiod, *Theogony* 450–52).
105. *man-slaying destruction*: The reference is specifically to civil strife ('intestine violence in the community').
106. *Wolf god*: Apollo Lykeios (cf. *Seven* 146–7), who is here being begged *not* to be wolf-like towards the young Argives.
107. *may the best... bear many young*: With the result that, over the years, the quality of the flocks as a whole will steadily improve.
108. *And may the people... citizens' privileges*: That is, may the sovereign people as a *collectivity* protect the rights that citizens have as *individuals*.
109. *may they offer... agreements*: In Greek interstate relations, the phrase *dikas didonai*, used here, often means 'go to arbitration', so the Danaids' wish is probably that the Argives will always, before resorting to war, seek to resolve the dispute by this means.
110. *statutes of Justice the highly honoured*: The reference is to a set of fundamental ethical principles sometimes called the 'unwritten laws', nearly always three in number; these are variously

formulated in our sources, but in Aeschylus (cf. *Eumenides* 269–72, 538–48), perhaps under the influence of doctrines promoted in the mystery cult of his native Eleusis, they prescribe the giving of due honour to gods (704–6), to *xenoi* (both ‘foreigners’ and ‘those in a relationship of hospitality’) and to parents. The Danaids have prayed that the Argives may give due honour to *xenoi* (701–3) and to the gods, but they do not pray for them to respect their parents, and here apparently they are explaining why not – because this is only the third of the ‘unwritten laws’.

111. *sailing gear*: From a distance the ship’s sail would be its most conspicuous feature.
112. *side-screens*: These were often fitted on warships for the protection of the crew, especially from enemy missiles.
113. *scans the way ahead with eyes*: Greek warships regularly had large eyes painted on their port and starboard bows.
114. *these gods*: The ‘Assembled Gods’ of the shrine.
115. *your protection here*: That is, the sanctuary offered by the shrine.
116. *like ravens... altars*: Ravens, kites and other carrion-feeding birds were notoriously liable to ignore the sanctity of altars by stealing sacrificial meat.
117. *wolves*: The wolf was an emblem of Argos and appeared regularly on its coins.
118. *papyrus fruit*: It was actually the root and lower stalk of the papyrus plant that (some) Egyptians used as food (Herodotus 2.92.5); the implication in this sentence that they did not eat cereal foods is of course absurd.
119. *running stern cables... ship safe*: Danaus assumes that the ships will cast anchor in water of sufficient depth and then moor themselves with long cables from the stern.
120. *even to land an army*: Implying ‘much less to launch an attack’.
121. *land that we rightly revere*: Because it is the land of our ancestress Io (alluded to by the word *bounis* ‘hilly land’; cf. 117). There is an unstated implication that just as the land has a right to the Danaids’ reverence, *they* have a right to have their prayers to it heeded.
122. *its flesh turned black*: The heart and other internal organs could be spoken of as turning black when affected by powerful emotions (because blood flowed inwards from the surface regions, which went pale?). Cf. *Persians* 114–15; *The Libation-Bearers* 413–14.
123. *impossible to point out*: That is, invisible from any place ordinarily trodden by human feet.
124. < >: It is tolerably certain, on the evidence of the ancient annotations, that the now corrupt text here had to do with ‘release’ and ‘freedom from troubles’, but its exact wording and

syntax cannot be restored.

125. *beam of the balance*: The balance is that in which Zeus decides the fate of mortals (as in *Iliad* 22.209–12).
126. *yugh*: Greek *ioph*, according to the ancient commentator an onomatopoeic expression of disgust.
127. *Lord of the land*: Probably meaning Zeus rather than the absent Pelasgus (who is not otherwise mentioned until 905).
128. *Off, off, to boat... chopping off head*: These three lines, the first surviving full lines sung by the Egyptians, are the only place where it is hard to resist the conclusion that Aeschylus gave them broken Greek to sing.
129. *barge*: Greek *amas*; it is not known what kind of vessel this was, but since the word is attested only here and in a fragment of *Proteus* (fr. 214), a play set in Egypt, it was presumably an Egyptian type.
130. *your bolt-bound timbers*: That is, your ship.
131. *not respected in a city of pious men*: The Egyptians (profess to) believe that right is on their side (cf. 916–20) and therefore that the Argives, if they are pious, will not resist them on the Danaids' behalf.
132. *the water that rears cattle*: The water of the Nile.
133. *the blood that propagates life*: The ancient commentator's note is clumsily expressed, but his source appears to have correctly interpreted this passage to mean that Nile water promotes male fertility. If so, Aeschylus evidently believed (as Aristotle did later) that semen was a derivative of blood.
134. *Sarpedon's bank*: At the mouth of the river Calycadnus in Cilicia; the coast at that point faces nearly due east, towards northern Syria, so a wind 'blowing from Syria' would drive the ship on to a lee shore. The ship is imagined to have sailed all along the south coast of Asia Minor; it would have continued to Egypt either along the Syrian coast or via Cyprus.
135. *May great Destiny... that you are committing*: That is (if this heavily emended text is correct), 'May you perish before you can fulfil your impious plans'.
136. *you won't jump out of the Egyptian boat*: It would in fact be perfectly easy, and an obvious move, for the Danaids to avoid the hated marriage by such a leap to a watery grave – *unless* they are to be chained or tied up during the voyage. Are the Egyptians who have come with the Herald perhaps holding ropes or fetters, which they brandish when the Herald speaks these words?
137. *Zeus, child of Earth*: Rhea, the mother of Zeus, was identified with the Asiatic mother goddess Cybele, who was in turn sometimes identified with Earth (e.g. Sophocles, *Philoctetes* 391–4). In the

ordinary divine genealogy, Earth was mother of Cronus and grandmother of Zeus.

138. *Help... I'm being overpowered*: We may be meant to suppose that the Danaids have seen or heard the approach of the rescuing Argive force. It does not appear that the Herald or his men ever actually lay hands on them (cf. 925).
139. *My lord*: Probably addressed to the approaching Pelasgus.
140. *What local sponsor have you spoken to*: A foreigner, claiming that property or persons currently in Argos were his and ought to be surrendered to him, should not take the law into his own hands but should approach an appropriate Argive who would negotiate or litigate on his behalf.
141. *Hermes the Searcher*: 'Searcher' (*Mastērios*) is not otherwise known to have been a cult title of Hermes, but the Herald's meaning is anyway clear: as a herald, under Hermes' protection, he claims the right to search for and take 'his property' wherever it may be.
142. *barleycorn brew*: Egyptians drank beer (*zythos*) made from barley. Many Greeks today still regard beer, in contrast with wine, as a drink for women or the effeminate.
143. *in separate dwellings*: That is, in accommodation reserved for you alone (rather than being shared 'with many others'). The Danaids thus have the choice (cf. 1009–11) between (i) non-exclusive accommodation in public dwellings and (ii) exclusive accommodation in the palace or another building owned by the king. No doubt we will discover, later in the trilogy, that Danaus has chosen the latter, which will minimize contact between his daughters and ordinary Argives and, in due course, facilitate the wedding-night murders.
144. *I am your patron*: At Athens every resident alien (*metoikos*) had to have a citizen patron (*prostatēs*); the legal duties of a *prostatēs* are not altogether clear, but he would no doubt normally in practice befriend the *metoikos* and help him in any business which a citizen could handle more effectively than a foreigner. The Danaids will be in the unique position of having the king and the entire citizen body as their *prostatai*.
145. *feeling confident*: Possibly a hint that Danaus should be sent with an escort (cf. 954–5).
146. *even if a country... of alien language*: Otherwise put, no country, however welcoming it tries to be to refugees, is free from xenophobia, which can be activated by almost any (real or fancied) misdemeanour by, or special favours conferred on, the incomers.
147. *to their kin*: That is, to you and me.
148. *a burden it will never cast off*: The guilt and pollution of having

failed to protect the life of a suppliant and guest. The decreeing of an armed personal bodyguard to Danaus is a sinister development; at Athens, as elsewhere, it had in the past been the prelude to the establishment of a tyranny (cf. Herodotus 1.59.4–5).

149. *inscribe this*: On the tablets of your mind.
150. *an unknown group... time*: That is, it will take time and experience before the Argives know and esteem you.
151. *Go*: Grammatical details show that this is addressed by the Danaids to their father and to each other.
152. *Erasinus*: The Danaids will be crossing this small river en route from the coast to Argos. The other river of Argos, the Inachus (497), flows past the city on the far (north) side.
153. *Cytherea's consummation*: 'Cytherea', like 'Cypris', is a by-name of Aphrodite.
154. *Argive Soldiers*: The manuscript marks no changes of speaker anywhere in 1018–73, but the text makes it clear that 1018–33 come from one group, 1034–51 from another group (or maybe individual), and 1052–61 is an altercation between the two. The dissenter(s) have been identified as half of the Danaids disputing with the other half, as the maidservants of 977–9, and even as Danaus; the currently favoured candidates are the escort of Argive soldiers. Yet another possibility is that Hypermetra, the future rebel, here for the first time (and in breach of normal tragic convention) takes a stand against her sisters.
155. *together with Hera*: Hera was a patron of marriage; cf. *Eumenides* 213–16.
156. *awesome deeds*: Referring probably to the sway that Aphrodite exercises over the whole living world (cf. 998–1005 and *Danaids* fr. 44).
157. *they*: The sons of Aegyptus.
158. *That would certainly be best*: 'Certainly' translates the Greek particle *men* which signals that a second, contrasting statement is to follow; from this the Danaids, it seems, infer that the Argives are about to urge them to be less uncompromising, and interrupt to insist that such advice will be wasted on them.
159. *deprive us*: The strained language (one does not normally pray to a god to be *deprived* of something) draws attention to the fact that the Danaids are praying for what was normally regarded as the worst fate that could befall a woman – to remain unmarried.
160. *the two-thirds kind*: This expression is based on an interpretation of *Iliad* 24.527–33 according to which Zeus has two jars of evil and one of good, and humans' fortunes are either mixed equally from the three jars (and so are two-thirds evil) or else are

entirely evil.

THE DANAID TETRALOGY

1. *she comes to her fulfilment*: The adjective *teleios* ‘final, perfect, fulfilled’ was often used in reference to marriage, and, according to the lexicographer Pollux, the word could actually *mean* ‘married’.
2. < >: The verb (something like ‘despise’ perhaps?) will have had to be understood from the preceding line (spoken by someone else, very likely as part of a *stichomythia*, a dialogue composed of one-line speeches).

PROMETHEUS BOUND

1. *Power and Violence*: This pair come from Hesiod, *Theogony* 385–401, where they are children of Styx who live permanently with Zeus, follow wherever he leads and embody his absolute power over the universe.
2. *son of Themis*: This is an innovation; in Hesiod’s *Theogony*, Prometheus is the son of Cronus’ brother Iapetus and the Oceanid Clymene (507–11), while Themis has no children until she bears Dike, the Fates, the Seasons and others to Zeus (901–6).
3. *welcome to you... the early-morning frost*: That is, the coming of night will temporarily end one kind of suffering (from the sun) only to bring another (cold) from which, in turn, you will long for relief; and vice versa.
4. *is not yet born*: Hephaestus should no doubt be taken to intend this as an understatement for ‘will never be born’; the audience will probably detect an ironic allusion to Heracles (cf. Hesiod, *Theogony* 526–31), but they will later discover (757–68) that Prometheus knows of another sense in which a being not yet born could end his suffering.
5. *without bending your knee*: ‘Bending the knee’ idiomatically means ‘resting’ (396; *Iliad* 7.118, 19.71); but Prometheus in his bonds will be *literally* unable to bend his.
6. *companionship*: This expression may possibly foreshadow the cultic association in classical Athens between Prometheus and Hephaestus (they shared an altar in the Academy district); but this can hardly be imagined as existing at the time of the play’s

action, and the poet may be thinking rather of Prometheus' alliance with the Olympians in their war against Cronus and the Titans (cf. 214–21).

7. *your skills aren't... the task you now have*: Implying that the responsibility lies with Zeus (who gave the order) and / or with Prometheus (who brought his punishment on himself).
8. *harness is ready here*: Prometheus' 'harness' consists of metal bands clamping his arms (55–63), upper body (71) and legs (74–81) to the rock, plus the wedge ostensibly driven through his chest (64–9).
9. *intellectual*: Greek *sophistēs* 'one who professes wisdom or expertise'.
10. *hammer in the pierced fetters*: That is, drive nails into the rock through the nail-holes in the metal band(s).
11. *tough appraiser*: Zeus.
12. *putting it into a fennel stalk*: Cf. Hesiod, *Theogony* 565–7.
13. *Enter... vehicles*: How was the Chorus' entry staged? Not with the flying-machine (*mechane*): that could not carry a whole chorus, and it will be needed for Oceanus very shortly after the Chorus have left their 'vehicle'. The car(s) must either have been (i) rolled out on to the flat roof-space of the *skene* or (ii) simply brought into the *orchestra* (pushed on by some of the Chorus, while others ride in it them?). Neither alternative is free of difficulties, but (i) makes better sense of 277–83.
14. *prolific Tethys*: According to Hesiod, *Theogony* 364–8, Oceanus and Tethys had three thousand daughters and as many sons.
15. *sons of Uranus*: That is, the Titans, children of Uranus (Heaven) and Gaea (Earth). For the statement to have any relevance, Prometheus must himself be one of them, though we are never directly told so in this play (cf. however *Prometheus Unbound* fr. 193.1–2).
16. *president of the immortals*: Cf. Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, last paragraph: '... the President of the Immortals, in Æschylean phrase, had ended his sport with Tess.'
17. *one person under multiple names*: This identification is almost certainly an *ad hoc* invention (there is no other trace of it before Roman times). The poet wanted Prometheus to be one of the Titans (cf. on 165) but also wanted his mother to be Themis, a prophetic goddess (cf. *Eumenides* 2–4) who, according to Pindar (*Isthmian* 8.30–45), alone had knowledge that the son of Thetis was destined to be mightier than his father. Traditionally Themis was daughter of Gaea (and Uranus) (Hesiod, *Theogony* 135).
18. *saying that it was destined... but in guile*: Already in Hesiod (*Theogony* 626–8) Gaea gives crucial advice to Zeus and the

Olympians on how to defeat Cronus and the Titans; but there the advice is given directly (not through Prometheus) and involves the use of force (not guile).

19. *he immediately assigned... various privileges*: Cf. Hesiod, *Theogony* 885.
20. *rescued mortals from... going to Hades*: Prometheus was the helper god in the Greek version of the Flood story; his role is first attested in Epicharmus' comedy *Prometheus or Pyrrha* but must be older than that (cf. Hesiod fr. 2). Here, however, 'shattered' may indicate that we are to assume Zeus to have been planning a cataclysm of some other kind.
21. *foreseeing their death*: That is, knowing in advance just when they would die.
22. *descending*: If the Chorus have been on the *skene* roof (see on 128), they must presumably disappear into the *skene*, to re-enter later (after 396, there being no earlier opportunity) by a side-passage. This is a decidedly artificial arrangement but at least avoids having Oceanus and his daughters together on stage for 113 lines during which he takes no notice of them nor they of him.
23. *winged steed*: Oceanus calls his mount a 'bird' at 286 and a 'four-legged bird' at 395, which suggests that it is not just a winged horse but, as the *scholia* assume, something like a griffin (*gryps*), which had the body of a lion and the wings and beak of an eagle.
24. *our kinship*: Oceanus was the eldest child of Uranus and Gaea (Hesiod, *Theogony* 133).
25. *this land*: Scythia (cf. 2 and *Seven* 728–30).
26. *Know yourself*: That is (as this famous maxim often implies), 'Know your limitations.'
27. *I judge that by facts*: That is, if you had been 'good at admonishing yourself' and had behaved prudently, you would not be where you are now.
28. *my brother Atlas*: In Hesiod (*Theogony* 507–9), Atlas, like Prometheus, is son of Iapetus and Clymene; here, presumably, he has been tacitly transferred to Prometheus' new parents, Uranus and Gaea.
29. *earth-born inhabitant of the Cilician cave*: The whole passage on Typhon (Typhos, Typhoeus) is closely parallel to, and probably based on, Pindar, *Pythian* 1.15–28, who also mentions a 'Cilician cave' as his original home; Homer (*Iliad* 2.783) had placed Typhoeus 'in Arima', and there appears to have been a mountain range called Arima in Cilicia.
30. *who once rose up against the gods*: The revolt of Typhoeus (son of Tartarus and Gaea) is narrated in Hesiod, *Theogony* 821–68.

31. *narrows of the sea*: The Strait of Messina (whose narrowest point is actually some 55 kilometres from Mt Etna as the crow flies).
32. *Hephaestus sits forging red-hot iron*: For volcanoes as Hephaestus' smithies, cf. Euripides, *Cyclops* 599 (Etna); Thucydides 3.88.3 (Hiera, now Vulcano, in the Lipari islands). The idea here is that Typhon breathes or vomits streams of fire (cf. Pindar, *Pythian* 1.25) which heat Hephaestus' forge.
33. *from thence one day... with their fine crops*: A prophecy (*post eventum* from the poet's point of view) of the eruption of Etna which took place in the 470s (Thucydides 3.116; the *Parian Marble* dates it to 479/8), for only the second time since Greeks first colonized Sicily, and is vividly described by Pindar, *Pythian* 1.21–8.
34. *words are the healers of a sick temper*: Oceanus still hopes that his words can soften the heart of Zeus.
35. *reduce the swollen spirit... when it is still firm*: The angry spirit is compared to a tumour, which the doctor should not attempt to reduce until it has ripened and begun to soften of itself ('Hippocrates', *Aphorisms* 1.22).
36. *empty-headed naivety*: That is, a *reputation* for empty-headed naivety.
37. *to be sensible... best policy*: That is, I would rather be thought stupid (while actually being sensible) than actually be stupid (while being thought sensible).
38. *That shortcoming... mine*: That is, I am determined that I, not you, shall be the one to be 'thought stupid'. The implication, which Oceanus evidently perceives, is 'I am determined you shall not intercede with Zeus.'
39. *Chorus*: If the Chorus have been out of sight during the Oceanus scene (see on 283/4), they re-enter here and take up their normal position in the *orchestra*.
40. *maidens... Colchis*: The Amazons, who are here unusually placed in Colchis (modern Georgia); similarly in 719–24 they are said to be living south of the Caucasus in Prometheus' time (though destined to migrate elsewhere in a later generation).
41. *Lake Maeotis*: The Sea of Azov, which Herodotus (4.86) believed to be 'not much smaller' than the Black Sea, and which he and his contemporaries must therefore have supposed to extend far into the interior of Russia.
42. *Arabia*: There is significant though scattered evidence, from Xenophon (*The Education of Cyrus* 7.4.16, 7.5.14, 8.6.7) to the end of antiquity, that the name 'Arabia' was sometimes applied to a territory near the upper Euphrates, in what is now eastern Turkey.

43. *the hard-to-discern... stars*: Any given star rises (and sets) four minutes earlier each day, and Greeks used as markers of the seasons the days when prominent stars or star groups (e.g. Sirius, Arcturus, the Pleiades) could first be seen rising (or, six months later, setting) before daybreak. These risings and settings are 'hard to discern' because knowledge of them presupposes the ability to pick out the marker stars from the thousands of others in the sky.
44. *is mother of the Muses*: That is, facilitates the composition of poetry. There is a word-play on the traditional genealogy of the Muses, who were daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne (Memory) (Hesiod, *Theogony* 915–17).
45. *beasts*: Oxen (for ploughing) and asses (for transport); horses will be mentioned separately in 465–6.
46. *significant utterances and encounters on journeys*: Words that a person happened to (over)hear, or individuals or animals that he happened to meet, might in certain circumstances be regarded as omens of predictive significance; see for example Aristophanes, *Lysistrata* 391–7 (women's laments for the death of Adonis punctuating a speech advocating the despatch of the Sicilian Expedition) and Theophrastus, *Characters* 16.3 (a polecat crossing one's path as a sign of bad luck).
47. *their mutual hatreds, affections and companionships*: Knowledge of these was important for augury because it enabled the seer to relate the observed behaviour of a bird to (what was believed to be) its normal behaviour. Thus, when Xenophon was setting out from Ephesus to join Cyrus' expedition, a sedentary eagle screamed on his right side (Xenophon, *The Persian Expedition* 6.1.23); the seer whom he consulted told him that while this omen foretold greatness and glory, it also betokened suffering (because 'other birds mostly attack the eagle when it is sedentary') and did not portend material gain (because 'the eagle normally gets its food when it is on the wing').
48. *smoothness of internal organs*: This, and what follows as far as 499, refers to the drawing of omens from the appearance of the internal parts of sacrificed animals, and from the manner in which they burned on the altar.
49. *I wrapped the thigh-bones... and burnt them*: Prometheus is said by Hesiod (*Theogony* 535–57) to have been the inventor of this Greek sacrificial practice, but there he does it in an attempt (unsuccessful, and disastrous for humanity) to deceive Zeus, whereas here his object is to enable mortals to use the flames for divination.
50. *who is the steersman of Necessity*: Evidently expecting the answer

‘Zeus’.

51. *bath*: The ritual bathing of bride and groom was an important preliminary to an Athenian wedding.
52. *my sister Hesione*: The wife of Prometheus (and mother of Deucalion, the Flood hero) is variously identified in various sources; the fifth-century mythographer Acusilaus of Argos names her as Hesione the Oceanid, as here.
53. *the myriad-eyed cowherd*: Argus; cf. 677–81 and *Suppliants* 302–5.
54. *noisy reed-pipe, fashioned with wax*: The reference is to a herdsman’s pan-pipes, whose reed-stems were held together with wax (cf. Euripides, *Iphigenia in Tauris* 1125–7; Virgil, *Eclogue* 2.32–3).
55. *soporific*: Hermes, in some accounts, played the pan-pipes to lull Argus to sleep before killing him (so probably Bacchylides 19.35–6; later, Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 1.682–714).
56. *to open one’s lips to friends*: Prometheus regards Io as a ‘friend’, though he has never met her before, either because he is a friend to all mortals (cf. 612, 613) or because her father, the river god Inachus, is a son of Oceanus (cf. 636) and therefore his own nephew.
57. *By explaining... done enough*: Implying, apparently, that his promise at 617 was to answer just one question about himself.
58. *sisters of your father*: See note on 611.
59. *Cerchnea* (later Cenchreae) was a village south-west of Argos (Pausanias, *Guide to Greece* 2.24.7), not far from Lerna.
60. *travel over the uncultivated plains*: Crossing northern Europe towards the Black Sea.
61. *Chalybes*: Cf. *Seven* 728. From here to 728 we are apparently to the north-east and east of the Black Sea, between the Cimmerian ‘Bosporus’ (the Strait of Kerch, to the east of the Crimea) and Colchis (Georgia; cf. note on 415–16); yet it is *after* passing through this region that Io will cross the ‘Bosporus’ (729–35). This geographical confusion may be accidental or intentional. The poet has retained the tradition of Io’s crossing a strait that was thereafter named the Bosporus (cf. note on *Suppliants* 546), transferring it from the Thracian to the Cimmerian strait; but he wants this crossing to be a passage from Europe to Asia (734–5) and also from lands more or less known to Greeks (with violent but human inhabitants) to the realm of pure fantasy (populated mainly by monsters) described in 791–809. The boundary between Europe and Asia was sometimes said to lie at the Cimmerian Bosporus, sometimes (as in *Prometheus Unbound* fr. 191) at the river Phasis (Rioni) in Colchis (cf. Herodotus 4.45): either the poet has been misled into supposing these two watercourses to be one and the same, or he has deliberately

shifted the location of the Bosphorus in order to present it more strongly as a point of transition into a different and even more terrifying world.

62. *the Violent River*: This river, flowing north-west from the Caucasus, may well be the Kuban, which rises on the slopes of Elbruz (the highest peak in the Caucasus) and flows into the Sea of Azov not far from the Strait of Kerch (see previous note).
63. *who will one day... stepmother of ships*: This digression on the future abode of the Amazons is irrelevant, unless it foreshadows a mention (not directly attested) in *Prometheus Unbound* of Heracles' battle with the Amazons at Themiscyra (cf. pseudo-Apollodorus, *Library* 2.5.9). It also involves a further geographical confusion. Themiscyra, at the mouth of the river Thermodon, was in northern Asia Minor, nearer the eastern than the western end of the Black Sea; Salmydessus was in Thrace, north-west of Byzantium and the (Thracian) Bosphorus, and the danger to ships in that area arose not from a rocky promontory but from extensive shoals (Xenophon, *The Persian Expedition* 7.5.12). Possibly the poet was thinking of the cape near Themiscyra later called 'Heracles Point' (Strabo, *Geography* 12.3.17).
64. *Cimmerian isthmus*: The eastern peninsula of the Crimea, ending at Panticapaeum (Kerch), capital of the Bosporan kingdom.
65. *this rugged rock*: It appears that at some point (perhaps at 613) Io has ascended to the stage platform.
66. *She will bear a son superior to his father*: This probably identifies the mysterious female, for the audience, as Thetis; cf. Pindar, *Isthmian* 8.36–8.
67. *the third in birth on top of ten other births*: Io has no way of knowing whether this refers to her thirteenth child or (as it in fact does) to a descendant in the thirteenth generation. The descent line is (females in italics): *Io*, Epaphus, *Libya*, Belus, Danaus (and Aegyptus), *Hypermetra* (and Lynceus), Abas, Acrisius, *Danaë*, Perseus, Electryon, *Alcmene*, Heracles.
68. *waveless sea*: An apt kenning to describe the south Russian steppe: see S. R. West, 'Alternative Arabia', *Hermes* 125 (1997), pp. 377–8.
69. *Phoricides*: Also called the Graeae. Like the Gorgons, they belong to the story of Io's descendant Perseus, who by seizing their shared eye and tooth forced them to tell him how to find the nymphs who possessed the equipment he needed to cut off Medusa's head.
70. *of swan-like aspect*: Presumably meaning 'white-haired' (cf. Euripides, *Bacchae* 1365; Aristophanes, *Wasps* 1064–5): the

- Graeae were white-haired from birth (Hesiod, *Theogony* 271).
71. *whom neither the sun... ever looks upon*: The language echoes *Odyssey* 11.16, describing the Cimmerians, on whom the sun never looks because their country is 'shrouded in mist and cloud'.
 72. *Arimaspians*: The poet's ultimate source here is the epic *Arimaspea* ascribed to the semi-legendary figure Aristeas of Proconnesus, supposed to have lived in the seventh century. The griffins and Arimaspians were said to be at enmity, the latter trying to steal the gold which was guarded by the former. See Herodotus 3.116, 4.13–14; Pausanias, *Guide to Greece* 1.24.6.
 73. *river Pluto*: In this context the name will probably be associated with wealth (*ploutos*) rather than with the underworld.
 74. *at the sources of the sun*: That is, at the south-eastern extremity of the world, where Asia and Africa are evidently imagined as being joined together.
 75. *the cataract*: The First Cataract, near the cities of Syene (Aswan) and Elephantine in Upper Egypt; it was regarded as the boundary between Egypt and Ethiopia (Herodotus 2.17, 2.29). Herodotus (2.28) had heard, but did not take seriously, a story that at this place there were twin mountain peaks and between them two springs from which one river flowed north as the Nile, another south towards Ethiopia: do our poet's 'river Aethiops' and 'Bybline [i.e. Papyrus] Mountains' reflect a version of this story?
 76. *the three-cornered land of Nilotis*: That is, the Egyptian Delta.
 77. *the great gulf of Rhea*: The Adriatic.
 78. *in the opposite direction*: That is, inland, crossing Europe towards the remote region where she now is.
 79. *shall be called 'Ionian'... a memorial to your journey*: In fact the name was normally applied in antiquity, as now, only to the area of sea south of the narrows between the heel of Italy and what is now Albania.
 80. *Canobus*: See note on *Suppliants* 311.
 81. *named after the manner in which Zeus engendered him*: See notes on *Suppliants* 45–7.
 82. *female brood of fifty children*: The Danaids; the passage 853–69 is virtually a résumé of the Danaid trilogy.
 83. *hawks following close behind the doves*: Cf. *Suppliants* 223–6.
 84. *So may the bridal night be for my enemies*: Lit. 'May such a Cyprus come upon my enemies.'
 85. *one of the girls*: Hypermestra.
 86. *Necessity*: Greek *Adrasteia*, lit. 'inescapability'. 'I bow to Adrasteia' was a formula used to apologize for a remark that risked offending some divine power; the apology was usually made in advance (e.g. Plato, *Republic* 451a; Menander, *Samia*

503), but sometimes in arrears (e.g. Menander, *Perikeiromene* 304). The Chorus are thus telling Prometheus that if he is wise, he will apologize at once for his rash remarks about Zeus.

87. *clever fellow*: Greek *sophistēs* (see note on 62).
88. *You*: Plural, referring to the whole Olympian family.
89. *two successive autocrats*: Uranus and Cronus.
90. < >: The lost line must have contained words even more offensive to Hermes than those Prometheus has used to him already.
91. *Ah me*: This exclamation by Prometheus seems to be triggered by Hermes' mention, in connection with him, of the prosperity that is now so far away.
92. *which will turn black with gnawing*: 'Like any half-eaten piece of offal, dark from exposure to the air and from dried blood' (M. Griffith, *Prometheus Bound* (Cambridge 1982), p. 267).
93. *until some god... depths of Tartarus*: This condition (which Zeus / Hermes evidently suppose to be impossible of fulfilment) will surely have been fulfilled, in some unexpected way, in *Prometheus Unbound*. It is almost certainly to be linked with the story about the centaur Cheiron told in pseudo-Apollodorus, *Library* 2.5.4, 2.5.11. Cheiron, who was immortal, having been painfully and incurably wounded by Heracles' arrow, longed to die but was unable to do so, thus becoming Prometheus' 'successor in suffering' (in kind if not in degree) until 'Prometheus gave to Zeus one who would become immortal in exchange for him'. The 'one who would become immortal' was not, as many have thought, Prometheus himself (who was immortal already) but Heracles: by making Cheiron confer on Heracles his own unwanted immortality, Prometheus, with typical ingenuity, will have enabled Cheiron to die ('willing[ly]... go[ing] down to rayless Hades'), enabled Heracles to become a god, and himself fulfilled the condition laid down for his release. All this is likely to have occurred, as part of a general settlement, after Heracles had shot the eagle and after Prometheus had revealed the secret concerning Thetis.
94. *this threat is no invention... every word he speaks*: The text does not make the structure of Hermes' argument completely clear: his point is that (though he, Hermes, is a notorious liar and deceiver) the threats he has announced are not an 'invention' by him but have 'all too certainly been uttered' by Zeus, who never lies, and therefore they cannot be ignored.
95. *the double-ended tress of fire*: The thunderbolt, often represented in art with a flame at both ends.
96. *I am willing... what I must*: This does not necessarily imply that

the Chorus intend to share all Prometheus' sufferings themselves, only that they are resolved never willingly to desert him. That they do in the end flee (for to have them swallowed up together with Prometheus would be highly inconvenient, both from the theatrical point of view and from that of the story) bears witness not to their cowardice or feebleness but to the staggering display of Zeus' power, which would numb any mind but that of Prometheus.

97. *The rock... its interior*: The staging of this finale must be consistent with the text, must respect the limits of what was possible in the fifth-century theatre, and must avoid the anti-climax that would certainly be felt if, when the words and the music had ended and the Chorus had departed, Prometheus was seen bound to the rock as if nothing had happened. I have elsewhere suggested (*Aeschylean Tragedy* (Bari 1996), p. 313) that Prometheus 'is attached to a board directly in front of, and indeed resting on, the central doors of the *skene*, and these doors are [now] suddenly opened (inwards...) [so that] the board with Prometheus on it will fall back into the dark interior... men [being] in readiness to stop the board hitting the floor and drag it back clear of the doors'.

PROMETHEUS UNBOUND

1. *Phasis*: Now the river Rioni in Georgia. On inconsistencies and/or confusions in the definition of the Europe–Asia boundary in the Prometheus plays, see note on *Prometheus Bound* 715.
2. *Red Sea*: For classical Greeks this name denoted the whole Indian Ocean with its gulfs.
3. *the bay beside the Ocean... gentle water*: Evidently at the place called in *Prometheus Bound* 808–9 'the sources of the sun', at the south-eastern extremity of the world, where Asia and Africa are imagined as being joined together.
4. 193: This passage has survived in Latin, not in Greek – in a translation by Cicero, who quotes it in his *Tusculan Disputations* (2.23–5). Like all Roman writers, he latinizes the names of Greek gods – Uranus, Cronus, Zeus and Hephaestus become Caelum, Saturn, Jupiter and Mulciber (i.e. Vulcan); I have restored the conventional English renderings of the Greek names.
5. *from which fall drops*: Drops of blood, or rather of its divine equivalent, 'ichor'. According to Apollonius of Rhodes, *Argonautica* 3.845–66, these drops caused a plant to spring up, an

ointment extracted from which was later used by Medea to make Jason invulnerable for a day. This tale may well go back to Sophocles' play *The Women of Colchis*, which is known to have contained a narrative digression about Prometheus' sufferings; we cannot tell whether *The Women of Colchis* was earlier or later than *Prometheus Unbound*.

6. *Caucasus*: Cicero, like most who wrote about Prometheus in antiquity (including at least one ancient commentator on *Prometheus Bound*), thought that the Caucasus was the scene of his binding; it certainly was not so in *Prometheus Bound* (cf. lines 719–20 of that play, where Io must travel far to reach the Caucasus), and there is no reason to believe that it was so in *Prometheus Unbound* either. Cicero has doubtless added the word for metrical and/or stylistic reasons, unaware that he was introducing a geographical error.
7. *Gabians*: Evidently the same as the *Abioi* of *Iliad* 13.6, who seem there to be envisaged as living somewhere north of the Black Sea.
8. *Apollonius of Rhodes says: Argonautica* 4.282–7; Apollonius does not mention the Hyperboreans, so the author of *Prometheus Unbound* probably did. The Ister is the Danube; the Rhipaeian Mountains were (usually) believed to be in the far north Europe, so mention of the Hyperboreans – the dwellers ‘beyond the North Wind’ – would be appropriate.
9. *to take any stones from the ground*: For use as emergency weapons.
10. *cover it completely with a hail of round stones*: This story provides an aetiology for the existence of the ‘Plain of Stones’ – the stony and arid (now partly irrigated) Plaine de la Crau, stretching east of the Rhône between Arles and the sea and once covering nearly 400 square kilometres, which will have been well known to Greeks through its proximity to the Phocaeian colony of Massalia (Marseille).
11. *This son... my enemy*: Plutarch (*Pompey* 1.1), when quoting this line, says that it is spoken by Prometheus ‘after being saved by Heracles’; and we can gather from its text (i) that he is addressing someone *other* than Heracles and (ii) that he has not yet been reconciled with Zeus. Perhaps then he is telling his mother (see pp. 199–200) about recent events?
12. *In honour of Prometheus*: Cf. *Sphinx* fr. 235.